Dick Kent in the Far North

MILTON RICHARDS

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Richard Woodman

from

Aunt June

— 1928 —

The crossing was made without mishap.
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Dick Kent In the Far North

By MILTON RICHARDS

AUTHOR OF
"Dick Kent with the Mounted Police"
"Dick Kent with the Eskimos"
"Dick Kent, Fur Trader"
"Dick Kent and the Malemute Mail"

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Boys of the Royal Mounted Police Series

Stories of Adventure in the North Woods
FOR BOYS 12 to 16 YEARS

By MILTON RICHARDS

Dick Kent with the Mounted Police
Dick Kent in the Far North
Dick Kent with the Eskimos
Dick Kent, Fur Trader
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CHAPTER I

THE MAP IN THE CAVE

THREE persons plodded along the snow-piled floor of a tiny canyon in the heart of the northern Canadian wilderness. The broad snow-shoes on their feet made their progress like that of so many huge crabs on a sea shore. In the fore was a tall, well-knit young man, whose weather-tanned face was that of Dick Kent, who for more than a year had sought and found adventure in the vast land where the sole guardians of the peace are the Royal North West Mounted Police.

"It can't be very far from here," he turned and spoke, his breath puffing out in white vapor.

Sandy MacClaren strained his eyes ahead. His stocky frame, no less hardened than that of his older chum, Dick Kent, seemed to bend forward with a little more eagerness as he replied:

"I hope we don't pass it by."

The man in the rear laughed. He was Sandy's uncle, Walter MacClaren, an old Scotchman, and factor at Fort Good Faith for the Hudson's Bay Company.

"I hardly think I could miss the cave," he spoke. "I spent too many unpleasant hours in there without anything to eat."

Dick Kent was about to respond to this, when he caught sight of what they were seeking, the mouth of a large cave in the wall of the canyon.

"There it is!" he cried, quickening his pace.

"Now for the map!" exulted Sandy.

All three removed their snowshoes at the mouth of the under-ground passage, which seemed to have been formed by the erosion of water in ages gone by, and, in moccasined feet, went along the dark corridor, lighting candles which they had brought with them from Fort Good Faith, not far south.

"Remember it's the left branch when we get to the fork," Sandy called to his chum.

"Yes, I guess I won't forget that."

Dick recalled a particularly exciting incident in that same cave, which would indelibly impress upon his memory the correct passage to the underground chamber, which was their destination.

The three hurried on down the main passage until

ahead, in the dim glow of the candles, they could see where the main cavern branched. Almost there, Dick in the lead, paused.

"Wait," he whispered.

Sandy and his uncle drew back.

"I thought I heard a sound in the passage to the right," Dick said in a low voice.

They listened for a few seconds, but heard nothing.

"Probably some animal who has come in here out of the cold," Sandy's uncle observed.

"It sounded like footsteps," Dick replied dubiously. "And you know we've plenty of reason to believe we're not the only ones after what's in this cave."

Sandy agreed, but was anxious to go on, and since whatever sound had been detected by Dick's sharp ears was not repeated, they continued down the passage to the left.

For several minutes they wound downward before they reached the widening of the passage and abruptly entered an underground chamber which seemed to have been fashioned by the tools of man.

"At last," whispered Dick.

There was no sign of life evident, except those a week or so old, as they hurried to a particular portion of the rock wall and bent over it with their candles. What the light revealed was a confusing

tracing of charcoal lines and crosses. It was the map of the location of the lost gold mine, and had been the purpose of their visit.

"I'll copy it on this sheet of paper I've brought, so it will be clear to you boys," Sandy's uncle spoke, his voice sounding hollow in the silent, damp place.

He had just placed the paper on a smooth portion of the rock and touched the pencil to it, when a sound brought them to their feet. Somewhere along the passage they had come a stone had fallen. Someone was following them!

For the benefit of those readers who did not follow the adventures of Dick Kent and his chum, Sandy MacClaren, in the first volume of this series, a few explanations may clear up many obscure points. Several months before, they had with the aid of the mounted police, rescued Walter MacClaren from the control of Bear Henderson, an unprincipled enemy of the Hudson's Bay Company, who had tried and failed to gain control of all the far north trading posts. In the incidents leading to the rescue they had met a particularly mysterious enemy, whom they called the Scar-Faced Indian.

At Fort Good Faith—when as a reward for their help during the Henderson trouble, Sandy's uncle had consented to let them hunt for the lost mine—the scar-faced Indian had been detected eavesdrop-

ping at the door by Toma, a young Indian guide, who had accompanied the boys on many of their adventures. Toma had sworn vengeance against Scar-Face, since he believed his brother, Big John Toma, had been killed by the Indian. But, with his usual elusiveness, Scar-Face had escaped Toma, and the boys were left to wonder just what steps the Indian would take to thwart them in their attempt to find the mine.

The sound that had startled the three in the cavern chamber immediately brought before the minds of Dick and Sandy a vision of the evil face of the Indian.

"Shall we go back and chase whoever it is out of the cave?" Sandy queried tensely.

"I wouldn't do anything like that," Dick shook his head. "If it's the scar-faced Indian he'll have a trap set for us. We'll just watch the entrance while your uncle copies the map. When that's done, all three of us will be ready for trouble."

Factor MacClaren considered Dick's plan wise and went ahead with his work, while Dick and Sandy turned their attention to the entrance of the chamber.

Fearfully they waited, wondering just what might appear. It was very nearly an hour before Walter MacClaren finished copying the map, yet no one

Map Drawn by Factor MacClaren

had come. Out of the corner of their eyes, Dick and Sandy watched the factor erase the charcoal tracings on the rock and turn to them.

"We're ready to go back to the fort now," he said.

"If we ever get back," Sandy rejoined.

"Oh, I don't think there's much danger with the three of us," Dick encouraged.

"Yes, but that scar-faced Indian is apt to have some one with him, and if they jump down on our heads from one of the ledges in this cave, we'll have small chance of getting away."

"Well, we've got to hope for the best and be prepared to fight with all there is in us," Dick responded grimly, gripping his rifle, a 45.70 Winchester, and starting into the cavern.

Tensely Sandy followed, the factor taking up the rear with the precious map stuffed under his heavy bearskin overcoat.

Slowly they progressed back along the dark passage, scanning the shadows ahead and overhead for a sign of whatever had made the noise. A hundred feet from the chamber, a pair of eyes glowed out of the darkness. Dick raised his rifle, aiming at the gleaming points ahead. His sights came into line squarely and he fired.

The crack of his rifle was almost deafening.

"I got him!" shouted Dick, hurrying forward. "A bear!"

Sandy and his uncle had joined Dick over his kill. The large black body quivered under the candle light.

"I hated to do it," Dick was sorry. "Poor old fellow!"

"He was probably wintering here somewhere," Sandy's uncle put in. "I wonder if he made that rock fall which we heard."

"Probably did," said Sandy.

"Well, I hope so," the factor declared earnestly. "My old bones won't stand much excitement. I'm not the tough customer I used to be when I was your age."

All three went on, a little more confident that no danger lay ahead. Dick alone, had his suspicions of what lay before them, and he was about to advise the factor to walk between him and Sandy, when of a sudden, there sounded the fall of a body directly behind them. There came a grunting shout and Sandy's candle was knocked from his hand, and the cavern plunged in darkness.

"Hey!" Dick whirled, his gun clubbed. The sound of scuffling was heard, and blindly he plunged back.

"Here he is," Sandy's muffled shout directed him.

"He's got Uncle Walter down, trying to take the map away from him."

Sandy's voice died away with a sudden *umph!* Dick's rearward leap was stopped by a heavy body. The shock almost knocked the breath out of him, but he clung on to the person he had collided with, feeling that it was neither Sandy nor the factor.

"Here, here! I've got him!" cried Dick, panting. Then he was overpowered and thrown heavily down. The sound of retreating footsteps sounded along the cavern in the darkness. Sandy's candle flared up under a match.

"Are you all right, Dick?" was Sandy's question.

Dick picked himself up and replied that he was. "Quick, find out if he got the map from your uncle!"

Factor MacClaren himself replied: "Luckily he didn't, though he thinks he did. He got an old letter out of my inside breast pocket. The map is safe. Wonder who it was?"

"It must have been the scar-faced Indian," Dick guessed the identity of their unknown assailant. "Say, he didn't work slow, did he?"

"I'll say he didn't," rejoined Sandy, rubbing one eye, which was already commencing to blacken from a blow received at the hands of the man in the dark.

"Let's hurry and get out of this hole and back to the fort," said Dick hastily.

All three hurried on and reached the blinding sunlight of the canyon without further mishap. An hour later they were in the big log house of the factor, gathered around the map, listening to Walter MacClaren's directions regarding it. Toma, the young Indian guide who was to accompany them on the trail to the lost mine, had joined them. His dark, immobile face was over the table with the rest, when a tall, long-haired man entered. They looked up.

"Hello, Malemute," Dick greeted the newcomer. "What's the news?"

"Reckon we're goin' to have company on this here trip," said the big man. "A constable of the mounted from Fort Dunwoody has just come in with instructions to capture a party of fur thieves, hidin' in the territory you're goin' into."

"Good! We may need him badly before we get through," Dick replied.

Malemute Slade, an official scout for the mounted police, who through the effort of the factor had been detailed to accompany the boys on their trip northward, agreed with Dick, and ushered in a scarlet-coated, brisk-looking officer, at sight of whom

both Dick and Sandy emitted exclamations of delight. It was no less than Corporal Richardson, an old friend, whom they had aided when he was wounded on the trail from Fort du Lac to Fort Dunwoody.

Corporal Richardson was as pleased as they at this reunion, and, at their invitation, joined them around the big table in the post living room.

That night, after a brain-taxing afternoon, following the factor's instruction regarding the location of the lost mine, Dick lay wide awake until very late, thinking over the happenings of the day. He had a bunk curtained from the living room, not far from the entrance to MacClaren's private sleeping room. He realized that Sandy's uncle had taken the map with him, and half that kept him awake was a fear that another effort might be made to steal it. Lying there, looking up into the impenetrable darkness, it seemed that a hundred suspicious sounds were audible. But at last he fell fitfully asleep.

It seemed to Dick that he had slumbered for only a moment, when suddenly he was wide awake, his skin prickling as if some unknown presence were in the room. Quietly he lay there, listening in the darkness, forcing the dullness of sleep from his senses. What had awakened him?

Then his hand crept slowly to the head of his bunk where a rifle leaned. Some one was fumbling at Factor MacClaren's door. As he strained his eyes in the dark, he could distinguish a shadowy figure crouching there.

CHAPTER II

A MESSENGER FROM HEADQUARTERS

In the breathless interval that followed, Dick Kent was unable to decide upon a definite course of action. The figure of the man still crouched before Factor MacClaren's door but Dick, rifle in hand, felt that under no circumstances could he bring himself to fire point-blank at the shadowy form, even if the entire success of their expedition depended upon it. He could hear the slight rattle of the door, and the faint shuffle of the intruder's moccasined feet. Momentarily, he awaited the crash that would follow the man's efforts to break in.

The rifle lay like a dead weight in Dick's hands. The suspense and excitement of the moment seemed unendurable. His limbs had commenced under the strain to shake and quiver, as if afflicted by some deadly malady. If he fired, he would kill the man, and if he cried out, as he very much wanted to do, the man would probably kill him. It was the sort of predicament with which Dick had no desire to cope,

and yet here he was, in spite of himself, at the very beginning of their adventures, placed in a position that might have daunted a much older person.

While he still hesitated, there fell suddenly across the deep quiet of the room the smashing sound of the door breaking in, and through the dark shadows Dick perceived, as he sat there, wide-eyed with apprehension, the intruder thrown into Factor MacClaren's room with a force that carried him half way to the sleeping man's bed. He knew immediately what had happened. Shoulders hunched, the man had employed what, in school circles, would have been called football tactics. From a position about ten feet from the door, he had charged forward, breaking through the heavy obstruction and gaining access to the room.

He had picked himself up from the floor, as Dick sprang to the assistance of the factor, shouting as he went. By the time Dick had entered the chamber itself, a furious struggle was in progress—a wild tossing and tumbling about of two scarcely distinguishable forms. A chair crashed to the floor. Some heavy object whirled past Dick's head, striking the wall with a thudding impact, before it dropped clattering almost at his heels. No sooner had he started forward to give his assistance to Factor MacClaren in the unequal struggle, when he was thrown back

again violently, as the two men, locked in each other's arms, swayed into him. Dick sat down with a thump, the corner of the heavy table cutting the back of his head.

The fall had dazed him and his recovery was slow. From this point on Dick was unaware of the events that followed in rapid succession. His first really clear impression was that of a blinding glare of light in his eyes, and the voice of Malemute Slade raised in alarm.

"This boy's hurt a'right. Bad cut on the back of his head. Move back, corporal, while I lift him up."

The mounted police scout stooped forward and Dick felt himself being raised bodily, swung up in the powerful arms of his friend. Then Richardson spoke:

"I'll attend to MacClaren's bruises while you put this lad to bed. We're lucky in one way that no one was seriously hurt. Mighty lucky!"

"Except for that map, I'd call this night's business more than lucky," affirmed Malemute Slade. "But it's too blamed bad he got that. MacClaren'll feel worse about the loss of the map than the trummeling he got. Still as you say, corporal, we're all of us mighty fortunate that nothin' worse happened. Ol' Scar-Face ain't usually so keerful 'bout things."

The scout continued talking to himself as he carried his bewildered burden into the adjoining room.

"So the map's gone," Dick quavered a moment later. "Are you sure, Slade?"

"You sit here an' keep your trap shut," Slade ordered, not as gruffly as his manner indicated. "You're hurt, boy, an I'm goin' to fix you up. I'll fetch some bandages right quick."

"But the map——" Dick sat straight up, not in the least heeding Slade's command. "Did he really get it? I tell you, I must know."

"He sure did. Broke the window an' made good his escape. I don't want to discourage nobody, but you an' Sandy had better say good-bye to your chances of ever finding that mine. Jes' forget it."

An interval of silence ensued. The mounted police scout stroked Dick's hand.

"Plucky little savage—you!" he grinned. "But you better forget it. Sandy an' you can have lots of fun anyway. Couldn't keep you out of mischief very long, I guess. Not you two, I reckon!"

"I don't care so much about losing the map or our chance of finding the mine," declared Dick manfully, smothering what sounded very much like a sob, "but I hate to give up before we're really licked

—especially by that—that——" He paused, searching for the word that would most aptly describe the person he had in mind, "by that tripe," he concluded.

"Yeah, it does seem bad," Slade reflected. "'Course, we'll try to get the map back again. I didn't mean to sit with our arms folded, or anything like that. Scar-Face ain't through with us yet, an' the mounted police'll have a nice string of crimes chalked up to his credit when we do get him. But this here map is a different matter, if you can follow me, son. They'll be sure to hide or destroy it when they are in danger of being captured. It stands to reason that if they can't have the pesky mine themselves, they won't let you have it."

"You're right," admittted Dick.

"'Course I am. An' now for those bandages. No sense in sittin' here yapping like this anyway. We can't help ourselves by talking, can we? The thing to do is get goin'—quick!"

"You mean follow Scar-Face?"

"Yep. That's exactly what I do mean. A light snow has fallen an' he won't be so hard to track. Corporal Richardson an' I'll be on the trail in less than an hour. How does that strike you?"

"Splendid!" exclaimed Dick, unable to conceal

his enthusiasm. "Sandy and I will follow along in the morning. We'll catch up to you, won't we, Slade?"

The mounted police scout laughed as he strode away. When he had returned a short time later with his first-aid emergency kit tucked under one arm, a basin of water in one hand and a pair of scissors in the other, he was still grinning broadly.

For several minutes Slade was too busily occupied with his task of dressing Dick's wound, to find time to talk. Having finished, however, he sat down on the bed beside his young charge and playfully poked that young man in the ribs.

"So you an' Sandy are goin' to catch up to us," he chuckled. "Son, I like your spirit. It's boys like you that grow up to be men like—well, say like Corporal Richardson."

"Or Malemute Slade," suggested Dick.

A tiny scowl flickered between Slade's eyes.

"No—not me. I'm nobody. I ain't ever had a chance. I can't even read or write. A good mounted policeman has education, brains and nerve. I ain't got nothin' except nerve."

"And a heart as big as a house," added Dick. "Not to mention other things like woodcraft and knowledge of birds and animals and men. You know the location of most of the trails, lakes and

portages in this country. Corporal Richardson told me that you were a crack shot. He said that you could shoot faster and hit oftener than any person he had ever known. You're the best marksman in northwestern Canada."

Malemute Slade flushed to the roots of his hair.

"Look here," he began gruffly, "you keep your trap closed."

"I know now why you laughed when I said Sandy and I would overtake you and Corporal Richardson on the trail," grinned Dick. "What I meant, of course, was that we'd follow along and join you later."

"You'll stay right here until we get back," ordered Slade. "That's final. There's goin' to be some trouble up the line. We're risking our own lives—not yours."

"He's right, Dick," broke in the heavy, though not unmusical voice of Corporal Richardson. "Neither you nor Sandy can come along this time. You must wait here until we return."

Dick choked back his disappointment, looking up at the stalwart figure of Corporal Richardson through a blur of tears. He turned his head and stared miserably across at the room which had almost been wrecked in the recent encounter between Factor MacClaren and the scar-faced Indian. A

whirl of conflicting thoughts flashed through his mind.

"All right," he said dully, "but——"

He was interrupted by the appearance of an Indian servant, upon the heels of whom came a tall young man with flashing eyes, clad in a heavy fur coat and parka. For a brief moment the young man stood, surveying the three occupants of the room. Then, without further preliminary, he advanced shyly toward Corporal Richardson, fumbling in the pocket of his coat.

"For ze mounted police," he said, presenting Richardson with a long official-looking envelope. "Inspector Cameron he tell me take eet to you. To be queek. To be very careful. I have been on the trail eight, ten hours, monsieur."

"Thank you," said Corporal Richardson simply. He tore open the envelope, produced the letter and read its contents. Except for a slight pucker on his brow, there was no change in his expression.

"It will be necessary," he said, turning to Slade, "to change our plans completely. I must ask you to go on alone in pursuit of the scar-faced Indian. It will be my duty to proceed elsewhere. I'm sorry, Slade."

"Don't you worry about that, Corporal. Orders is orders. I'll go alone." A moment of silence,

then: "When do you think I'd better start?"

"Right away," answered Corporal Richardson.

Dick grunted and rolled back into bed, thoroughly disgusted with the whole world in general, but particularly with a certain body of men known as the Royal North West Mounted Police. They had commanded him to remain at the post, while glorious adventure stalked valiantly along the snow-white trail just beyond. He and Sandy were not babies to be petted and pampered in this manner. He'd show 'em. He——

With rebellion in his heart, Dick rolled over presently, thumped down his pillow, and, in a very short time, fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER III

SCARLET AND GOLD

Dick awoke on the following morning to find Sandy stooping over him, regarding him silently with eyes from which shone sympathy and deep concern. As a matter of fact, Sandy was seriously alarmed over his friend's appearance. Dick's bandaged head and somewhat pallid face gave him the look of one who hovers close to death's door. There was an unmistakable catch in the young Scotchman's voice as he leaned forward still closer to the recumbent form and inquired solicitously:

"Are you feeling any better, Dick?"

"I'm feeling fine," came the surprising answer, "and I'm going to get up in about three minutes and fight it out with Corporal Richardson. I have no intention of being treated like a child."

The angry wave of color that swept into Dick's cheeks, coupled with the dark frown and resentful eyes, so astonished Sandy that he sat down on the edge of the bed and gasped weakly:

"You don't really mean that. Why, Dick, you're no match for Corporal Richardson. Besides, it's a criminal offense to assault a mounted policeman."

"I'm not going to assault a mounted policeman," Dick petulantly explained. "I think too much of Corporal Richardson for that. What I intend to do is to find out why he intends to keep us here until Malemute Slade returns. My contention is that as long as we obey the laws and conduct ourselves like honest citizens, no person has the right to interfere in our business."

Sandy sat for a long time before answering. Here was a problem that required a good deal of careful thought and attention. On the face of it, Dick's grievance seemed pardonable, and yet common sense told him that Corporal Richardson was fair and just, not at all the sort of person to take advantage of his authority. If the mounted policeman insisted upon Dick and him staying here, there must be a good reason for it.

"Didn't Corporal Richardson tell you why he wanted us to stay here?" Sandy asked.

"He and Malemute Slade thought we would be risking our lives if we followed Scar-Face."

"Well, perhaps they're right."

Dick sat up and put one hand on his friend's shoulder.

"Listen to me, Sandy. Listen to me and then, if you wish, form your own opinion. The mounted police insist upon our remaining here at the post because if we undertake to follow old Scar-Face we may be risking our lives. They may be right. I haven't the least doubt but that we'll encounter certain dangers. Possibly we'll be risking our lives but," Dick paused and waved one hand dramatically, "what else have we been doing except just that: Risking our lives every day, running into dangers and difficulties with the consent of everybody, including the mounted police. Now, suddenly, for no reason at all, we're asked to be good little boys, to remain indoors for fear we may catch a bad cold. I tell you, Sandy, it sounds fishy to me."

"Dick, I think you'd make a great orator," said Sandy admiringly.

"And a poor soldier," chimed in a voice. "Pardon me for eavesdropping, gentlemen, but the fact is I couldn't help overhearing a part of your conversation."

Faces red with shame, the two boys turned in the direction of the newcomer, Corporal Richardson himself, who stood just inside the door. Dick could have bit out his tongue or, better still, hid his head under the pillow while some friendly magician trans-

ported him—bed, blankets and all—to some remote place, thousands and thousands of miles distant. For the first time he realized what a fool he had been—a miserable young fool with a wagging tongue in his head. He hadn't the courage to look Corporal Richardson in the face.

"You'd make a poor soldier," continued the corporal, calmly surveying the two culprits. "You see, Dick, a soldier's first duty is obedience. What do you suppose would happen to me if I questioned my superior's commands, if I didn't do what I was told to do even if, deep down in my heart, I believed or knew that my superior was in the wrong?"

"You'd be placed under arrest," surmised Sandy.

"Right! That's exactly what would happen to me. And I'd deserve the punishment I got."

Corporal Richardson ceased speaking for a moment, strode forward and placed a kindly hand on Dick's bandaged head.

"Now don't feel badly about this, Dick, and when I go out of the room I want you to try and forget the reprimand. Dismiss the whole incident, just as I propose to dismiss it. We're all friends, I owe you boys a debt of gratitude. I admire you both very much. As a general thing, I'm not usually one to hand out compliments or bestow praise, but I'll say

this: You and Sandy are as rough a pair of young vagabonds as it has ever been my experience to meet."

A roar of laughter greeted this amusing sally, and for a moment Dick entirely forgot his discomfiture.

"Seriously now," Corporal Richardson continued, "I want both of you to understand my position in this matter. Remember this: It is one thing to risk your life, but quite another to risk your life needlessly. That's exactly what you'd be doing if you went out on the trail with Malemute Slade. Your chance of stopping a bullet would be exceedingly good. Scar-Face would lead you into a trap before you had gone thirty miles. I tell you Henderson's gang of cut-throats and ruffians has become a terrible menace to the entire western portion of this north country. Conditions have never been worse since the Riel Rebellion. If things do not improve shortly, I'm afraid the Royal Mounted will be compelled to call in outside aid."

"But what will happen to Malemute Slade?" questioned Sandy in awed tones.

"To be perfectly frank, I'll be worried about him and won't know a single moment's peace until he returns. However, Slade can look after himself much better than he could if you boys went with him. He's the best scout in the mounted police service."

"Do you think he has any chance of recovering the map?" Dick asked.

Corporal Richardson shook his head.

"I doubt it very much. I do not believe any of us will ever see the map again. But that does not mean that you need give up hope altogether. Your chance of finding the mine and eventually getting it into your possession is almost as good now as it ever was."

"What do you mean?" both boys shouted out in unison.

"Henderson and his gang will be apt to find it, won't they? Well if they do, we'll take it away from them. Could anything be simpler? It sounds easy but, of course, it isn't. Just the same, I really do think the thing could be managed."

"A sort of roundabout way of gaining possession," laughed Dick.

"Any way is a good way, especially in their case," grinned Sandy. "But if you'll excuse me, I'm going to see Uncle Walter. He's covered with bruises from head to foot. Painful, of course, but not serious. I can't imagine how I managed to sleep through all that uproar last night."

"I'm not at all surprised," rejoined Dick, who well knew his friend's propensity in this regard, and never lost an opportunity of chiding him about it.

When Sandy had hurried away, Corporal Richardson turned to Dick.

"We're friends, aren't we?"

"You bet!" came the answer unhesitatingly. "Corporal, I owe you an apology. I can see now what a fool I was." Impulsively he extended his hand.

"Now that that's settled," said Richardson, "I have a job for you. Do you happen to remember the messenger, who came last night?"

"Yes."

"If you saw him again would you know him?"

"Yes," stated Dick positively.

"How did he impress you?"

"Why, favorably, I guess." Dick wondered what the policeman was driving at.

"That was my first impression too," Corporal Richardson resumed, "but I have since had occasion to alter it considerably. I don't mind telling you that I nearly made a very fatal error of judgment. That French-Canadian messenger was a fake, and he brought me a fake message, supposed to be from Inspector Cameron. I was fooled last night and permitted my man to escape. This morning a careful scrutiny of the message proved that the signature affixed was a forgery. In other words, the letter did not come from headquarters at all, although the

stationery upon which it had been penned must have been stolen from the Inspector's office."

"What did the letter say?" Dick asked.

"It instructed me to proceed, not later than the morning of March 2nd—which is today—to a place called Little Run River and there place a certain person under arrest for the theft of valuable furs."

"But what would be the purpose of such a hoax?" Dick wanted to know.

"Simply to get me out of the way. For some reason, not yet quite apparent, my presence here at Fort Good Faith is not wanted. For some reason, my presence here interferes with the carrying out of important plans of certain unscrupulous persons; which, of course, makes it all the more necessary why I should remain and why you should go on to Run River in my place."

Dick would not have jumped to his feet any quicker if he had been pricked by a pin.

"In your place!" he gasped. "Why, corporal, I don't understand! No one could mistake me for you!"

"When I get through with you," calmly smiled the mounted policeman, "anyone will be very apt to be fooled by the resemblance. The main thing is, you're about my height."

At that moment Dick was too excited to grasp fully what the corporal was telling him. Presently, however, he was enlightened.

"For the first time in your life, Dick," declared Corporal Richardson, still smiling, "you're going to don the uniform of his majesty's Royal North West Mounted Police."

CHAPTER IV

DICK MAKES A SUGGESTION

A VERY serious but elated young man, no other than Dick himself, strode into the room occupied by Corporal Richardson and proceeded to put on the scarlet and gold uniform of the Royal North West Mounted Police. At that particular moment his mind was in a whirl of conflicting emotions. He still possessed a somewhat hazy idea of what was expected of him, although he knew that when the time came Richardson would give him complete and painstaking instructions.

That he was embarking upon an important and mysterious errand, there could be no doubt, and it thrilled him to know that the mounted policeman had sufficient confidence in his ability to give him this chance to be of real service. As he pulled on the blue breeches with the wide yellow stripe and later the scarlet tunic, resplendent with braid and shining brass buttons, he made a solemn resolution to be worthy of the trust imposed in him.

"Sandy will laugh when he sees me," he told Corporal Richardson, "and I must say that I feel awkward and out of place."

"It fits you remarkably well," smiled the corporal, "considering how much heavier I am. I think I'm inclined to be proud of your appearance, and perhaps just a little bit jealous."

"When do you want me to start?" Dick asked.

"In about an hour. But first, there are a number of things I want to discuss with you. So, if you'll just sit down in that chair over there and listen attentively, I'm sure there'll be no question about the ultimate success of our plan."

"As I explained to you before," continued Corporal Richardson, "the French-Canadian messenger, who came here last night with the forged letter, is an agent or emissary of a band of crooks. Who these crooks are, I'm not altogether sure. My belief is that they're the fur thieves Malemute Slade and I have been trailing for the last three weeks."

Sitting very still and rigid in his chair, Dick followed closely every word spoken. Richardson's face had become serious, even stern in its expression.

"I've nothing very tangible to go on, of course, but during the past few hours I've given a good deal of thought to this case. I'm convinced of one thing. I'm positive that the fur thieves and Henderson's

gang are one and the same. I believe it was Henderson who sent the messenger last night. Henderson is the author of this strategy or hoax, just as surely as he is the person directly behind the effort to secure possession of your lost gold mine."

"You really think so?" Dick interrupted.

"Yes."

For a short interval the mounted policeman sat without speaking. The room had become almost intolerably silent. Turning towards the window, Dick looked out across a vast snow field, dotted here and there with the dark green of spruce and jack-pine.

"And now," suddenly resumed Richardson, "we've come to the very serious part of this whole business. I must confess to you that I'm worried and—you may be surprised at this admission—afraid!"

"Afraid!" Dick gasped. "Why, corporal, I can't believe that anything would ever frighten you."

"Something has," confessed Richardson, "and right now I'm frightened so badly that I'm almost inclined to tell you to take off that uniform and go and hunt up your friend, Sandy, for a game of cards."

Dick started to laugh, but a second look at the brooding, troubled eyes of the man opposite, choked his untimely mirth.

"This is a serious moment for you, my boy, and I'll tell you why. The message received last night was sent to me for a purpose. For reasons, as yet not quite clear to us, my presence at Fort Good Faith constitutes a hindrance to certain plans of Henderson. Henderson wants me to clear out—to go away. Why?"

"I'm sure I can't answer that question," said Dick.

"Neither can I; but I've a pretty fair hunch. Fort Good Faith is on the only direct, open, well-travelled trail, leading south to civilization. Henderson, let us say, has a valuable shipment of stolen fur. He wants to dispose of it. He's in a hurry to get it south before the spring thaw. Every day that he is forced to wait, is time and money lost. He's anxious to start right away, sending out his fur by dog teams, but he can't do that because I'm here at Fort Good Faith and will be sure to seize his shipment."

"Whew!" whistled Dick. "How did you ever contrive to figure that all out? It sounds very plausible."

"Nevertheless," said Corporal Richardson, "it's entirely supposition and may be absolutely wrong. I'm hoping that it's right, because if it isn't, the only other motive that I can think of for inducing me to go to Run River is a very sinister one."

"What is it?" asked Dick.

"A trap for me to fall into. Somewhere between here and Run River an ambush—a slinking half-breed or Indian lying in wait to pop me off. A score of mounted policemen have gone that way. It's an old trick. That's why I'm shivering clear down to the bottom of my feet for fear that I may be sending you out to your death. Before God, I wish I had detected that forgery before I ordered Slade to set out in pursuit of the scar-faced Indian."

Dick caught at the side of his chair, his cheeks deathly pale. The room seemed to be spinning around in a sort of dark haze, through which he could see the distorted face of Corporal Richardson opposite. When he had recovered somewhat, he observed that the mounted policeman had sprung to his feet and was pacing abstractedly back and forth.

"I can't—I can't do it, Dick," he was muttering "It isn't fair. No—there must be some other way."

"But I want to go," Dick insisted. "I'll take good care of myself and I'm sure nothing will happen. Anyhow, I'm convinced that your first guess was right, that Henderson and the fur thieves are planning to send that shipment."

"And, on the other hand," pointed out Corporal Richardson, "both guesses may be right. It would be a feather in Henderson's cap if he could dispose

of the furs and have me put out of the way at one and the same time."

For several moments the two stood, facing each other, both deep in thought. Suddenly, Dick's face lighted and he clapped his hands together gleefully.

"Corporal Richardson, I think possibly I may have hit upon a rather sensible plan," he cried out enthusiastically. "Why not follow the trail to Run River only a short distance, then strike off in an entirely different direction, make a wide detour, and come back here to the post. Henderson will naturally suppose that I have gone on to Run River. If your first supposition is correct, the dog teams with the fur will start to move down this way at once. If your second guess is right, I won't run into an ambush because I won't be travelling where they expect me to go."

"Good!" exclaimed Richardson. "Dick, you're a young man after my own heart. Why in the Dickens didn't I think of that myself."

"You've done well enough for one day as it is," Dick rejoined. "All I hope is that you won't have any trouble capturing the men with the fur shipments. Aren't they apt to put up a fight?"

"I expect that," answered the corporal, "but I'll have Sandy, young Toma and Mr. MacClaren to give me a hand if necessary."

Breakfast, a few minutes more of preparation, and Dick and the mounted policeman, the latter now clothed in ordinary civilian garb, slipped quietly out of the room and hurried down a long hall in the direction of the side entrance. As they went, the corporal was speaking in hushed undertones:

"It's just as well that Sandy doesn't see you before you go. We haven't time now for explanations or further delays. Good luck, and God be with you."

They paused for a single hand-clasp before Dick turned to close the door after him, which action Corporal Richardson prevented by sticking out his foot.

"Straight ahead until you cross the river, then take the first trail to your right," he called out. "Be careful!"

"Good-bye," said Dick without turning his head.

His eyes were moist and a sticky lump reposed in his throat. Chin out, arms swinging at his side, who, indeed, might detect anything amiss here? The trail was ahead, a glimmering stretch of snow, dazzling in the early morning light. Behind him were friends, comfort and a good fire.

Dick plodded on.

CHAPTER V

DICK IS INDISCREET

THREE hours after he had left Fort Good Faith, Dick Kent, still on the Run River trail, had become conscious of an increasing nervousness. The section of country through which he now passed was densely wooded, rugged and broken, a treacherous, uninviting prospect. Dick estimated that he had travelled about twelve miles from the post. To continue much farther might prove to be a dangerous business. Even now, as he went cautiously forward, he could almost persuade himself that behind every clump of bushes, behind almost every tree, there crouched the leering, skulking form of one of Henderson's men.

If he followed his original plan, the thing to do presently was to strike off, either to the right or left, and proceed on his way back by a circuitous route. Tonight he would camp somewhere in the open, building himself a shelter of spruce boughs. Tomorrow morning he would set out again, moving slowly, making a wide detour, always bearing in

mind that he must not, under any circumstances, return to Fort Good Faith before two days had elapsed. The fur thieves, both he and Corporal Richardson had conjectured, would be sure not to delay more than two days before commencing the trek southward with their valuable loot. So Dick had a good deal of time to waste, before he might hope to rejoin his friends.

A hundred yards farther on, a turn in the trail brought Dick to a small creek. Frozen, and covered deeply with snow, it traced its way through the dark green of the forest. From where he stood, Dick thought that it looked very much like a white snake, twisting through the trees. It would be great fun, he decided, to leave the trail at this point and follow the creek on a little voyage of exploration, later leaving it, if he found that the general course of the stream ran too far in the wrong direction.

Also, by following the creek, there would be a certain advantage to himself, well worth considering. It offered a smooth, hard trail to his feet, with no obstruction from rocks, bramble and bush, as the case would be if he chose to strike out in a more haphazardly course through the forest.

Turning to the left, Dick slid down the small embankment and commenced leisurely to walk along the creek bottom. The snow-crust was so heavy

that he paused, kicked off his snowshoes and went forward again, whistling happily. It was a great relief to leave the Run River trail. He would have no fear now of a deadly ambuscade. His heart had ceased its disconcerting flip-flops every time he went past a dark screen of brush or a heavy clump of trees. It now functioned in a more healthy manner.

The weather was mild, a stream of warm sunshine lighting the open forest spaces with a dazzling radiance. The glare of snow was hard on the eyes, but by keeping in the shadow of the large trees, bordering the creek, Dick contrived to overcome this difficulty.

In another hour or two he would pause for his midday meal. The long walk had given him an appetite. He was sorry that Sandy hadn't come along to enjoy the fun. On a day like this it was good to be alive. He grinned as a rabbit whisked across his path, boy-fashion stooping to pick up a chunk of ice to hurl after it. As he straightened up, eyes on the trail ahead, he was startled by the sight of a thin, white spiral of smoke curling up from the trees, not more than two hundred yards distant.

Dick stopped dead in his tracks, scarcely believing the reality of the thing he saw. He was totally unprepared in the emergency and for a moment stood, with bated breath, debating whether he ought to

go on or turn tail, like a frightened husky, and scamper for cover.

Corporal Richardson had warned him to keep away from all human kind. Before the experienced eyes of the average frontiersman Dick's masquerade would be useless. And once the deception had been laid bare, no one might tell how soon the news would reach Bear Henderson and his gang of outlaws.

To add to Dick's discomfiture, there emerged unexpectedly in plain view ahead the figure of a man. Half way across the creek the man paused, perceiving Dick, and one arm went up in a gesture of friendly salutation.

In chagrin, Dick bit his lips. His chance now to get away undetected had been lost. In less than four hours from the time he had left Fort Good Faith, he had committed a most unpardonable blunder. All very well for spying eyes to follow his progress along the Run River trail, and Indian messengers to report the news later to Henderson—that was playing the game correctly; but to be discovered here, four miles off the prescribed route, calmly throwing chunks of ice after scurrying rabbits, was an entirely different matter. If word of it ever reached the suspicious outlaw, Corporal Richardson's chances of capturing the fur thieves was very slim indeed.

"The only thing about me worthy of the name of

a mounted policeman is this uniform," Dick lamented to himself. "I've messed up everything. I'll be ashamed to go back and look Corporal Richardson in the face. Hang the luck!"

With a snort of disgust, he strode forward again to meet the waiting figure. There was no turning back now. The thing to do was to swallow his disappointment and endeavor to make the best of it.

In a few minutes more he had approached to within twenty feet of the man. His moccasins crunched lightly over the snow, but the blinding glare of sun in his eyes, together with the dazzling reflection of millions of white crystals underfoot, made it difficult to see. He heard a voice announce:

"Ah, et eez ze Corporal Richardson himself. I bid you ze welcome, monsieur. You come to ze house. You come——"

The words trailed off suddenly, culminating in an exclamation of surprise. Dick stopped.

"My mistake. Et ees not ze good Corporal Richardson at all. Mon Dieu! A boy!"

A prickling sensation ran up and down Dick's spine. He could see more clearly now, and one good look at the man in front of him was more than sufficient. Who could mistake those snapping eyes, or that tall, lithe, athletic figure? It was the messenger

of the night before—the man who had brought the forged letter to Corporal Richardson!

During the first few minutes of bewilderment and surprise, Dick found it impossible to think clearly, but as this feeling wore off, there flashed through his mind the thought that perhaps this messenger of Henderson had not yet discovered his true identity. The man had seen him only once. Dick presented an entirely different appearance now than he had on the evening before in the poorly lighted room at the post.

"What ees your name, monsieur?" demanded the Frenchman.

"Corporal Rand," Dick lied deliberately. "Recently from the mounted police training school at Regina. This is the first time I've ever been sent out on actual service. I arrived at Fort Good Faith a few hours ago to relieve Corporal Richardson, but I discovered he had left under instructions just a few minutes before for a place called Run River."

The Frenchman, to judge from the relieved expression on his face, actually believed the story.

"And so you already start on ze friendly patrol?" he inquired politely.

"No," answered the quaking young counterfeit, "at first that really wasn't my intention. I had hoped

to overtake Corporal Richardson before he had gone very far, but I guess I wasn't swift enough. There is no catching him!"

The messenger grinned at this admission. He surveyed the lanky young tenderfoot, bethought him of the prowess of Corporal Richardson on the trail, and doubled up in a paroxysm of mirth. Dick joined willingly in the laugh on himself.

"Monsieur will become swift himself if he continue to stay in zis countree," came the encouraging assertion.

"Conditions here are much different than they were in the south," explained Dick, "but I imagine that in time I'll get used to them."

"True, monsieur, an' now you are veree tired, I expect." The messenger's gestures were expressive. "So you will come with me to my house. You will honor me, monsieur. You will stay an' rest an' forget about ze hardness of ze trail. Baptiste La Lond ees a veree good friend to ze mounted police."

Dick guessed at the motive underlying the messenger's efforts at hospitality. La Lond was afraid that Dick might decide to return at once to Fort Good Faith. It would never do, of course, after getting rid of one policeman, to have all their plans spoiled by the sudden advent of a second.

"I really must return to Fort Good Faith at once," stated Dick, by way of a feeler. "I'll be stationed there for several days, I imagine."

"No! No! No!" protested La Lond, throwing up his hands in protest. "Et ees unthinkable. Monsieur is tired after ze hard trek. He must rest an' eat at my house." He paused, a smile of eagerness lighting his face. The dark eyes snapped. "An' now I will tell you ze beeg news, monsieur. Tonight my veree good friend, Pierre Chapelle, ees hold a dance at hees house. We will go. What you say, monsieur?"

"I'll think about that later," Dick answered, deciding to play into the other's hands. "I'll stay here for a while, if you insist. I really am very tired."

La Lond kept up a continuous chatter as he quickly led the way to the house—a small cabin, nestling in the woods. His host threw open the door to permit him to enter a tidy room, at one side of which Dick perceived a young man of about his own age.

"My brother, Phellep," explained the messenger, pushing his way in and closing the door. "We live here together. Phellep, take monsieur's coat."

Phillip La Lond rose stiffly, a look of fear on his face. Evidently he was not accustomed to enter-

taining members of the Royal Mounted and was probably trying to figure out the reason for Dick's unexpected visit.

But if Phillip experienced fear, he was not without company. Dick also was afraid. It had just occurred to him that perhaps the wily messenger had not been in the least deceived by the story, which he, Dick, had related. Perhaps La Lond had recognized him at the very beginning and was now planning some devilish method of getting rid of him.

During the preparation of the midday meal and for several hours afterward, Dick sat, shivering with apprehension. La Lond's continuous flow of conversation fell on unheeding ears. The pressure of the revolver in its holster at Dick's side was somewhat reassuring, yet what match was he, a single inexperienced youth, against a seasoned criminal like La Lond. He had probably made a serious mistake in coming here. No doubt, he would be made to pay dearly for his blundering. But in any event, it was up to him now to play the game in a way that would be a credit to the faith imposed in him.

And so with this grim resolve, Dick straightened in his chair, endeavoring to conquer the quailing spirit within. La Lond was still speaking:

"Perhaps monsieur ees veree tired an' would like to lie down an' rest," he inquired solicitously. "While

you have your leetle nap, Phellep will take ze run out to ze trap-line."

"What you mean, you deceiving scoundrel," Dick thought to himself, "is that you are sending Phillip over to Henderson's camp with the news of my coming." Then aloud:

"No, I'm not as tired as you think. Let's sit here and rest for a few minutes more, then all three of us will go out to examine your traps."

The appearance of animation and the smile of good fellowship suddenly and inexplicably disappeared. In their place a dark frown settled over the face of the messenger. For one brief moment he glared at Dick.

"All right, eet will be as you wish," he snapped. Then his eyes met Dick's in a look that could not possibly be misunderstood.

Unconsciously, Dick stiffened in his chair as he read the challenge.

CHAPTER VI

IN THE HOUSE OF THE MESSENGER

It was a trying ordeal. Never before, in all Dick's experience, had time seemed to pass so slowly as it did upon that fateful afternoon. The messenger had thrown aside all further attempts at conversation. Head bent forward, fingers locked, he feigned a drowsiness, which did not fool Dick in the least. Phillip, on the other hand, had grown restless, continually fidgeting about, or pacing up and down the room like a caged lion.

Occasionally Dick would catch a glimpse of a furtive, frightened glance cast in his direction. The younger La Lond, less adept in the school of deception, could not conceal his real feelings.

"Have you many traps out this winter?" Dick inquired, looking across at Phillip.

The other mumbled something in reply and went on with his pacing. Evidently, he had no desire to commit himself. In the cabin were no evidences of traps or trapping, and Dick would have been willing

to swear on oath that the brothers La Lond not only did not possess such a thing as a trap-line, but had other and more profitable ways of making a living.

To all appearances, the two brothers lived a life of ease and indulgence. The room was nicely furnished, the cupboards were stocked with food, two bottles of Hudson's Bay Company's rum peeped from behind an inadequate curtain. But the thing which struck Dick's gaze most forcibly of all, was a queer-looking object which stood near the fireplace. It was a sort of rack, cleverly constructed out of wood, upon which fairly bristled a miniature arsenal of guns, rifles, knives and belts—the last bulging with cartridges.

Time and time again, Dick's eyes returned to a fascinated scrutiny of that rack. There were weapons enough here to supply a small army. Deadly looking revolvers and automatics, shot-guns, 45 and 30-30 caliber repeating rifles, with here and there a long-bladed knife to add interest to the general effect.

On the floor, close to the rack, were several packing cases, as yet unopened, which probably contained a more complete supply of ammunition. The brothers La Lond might boast of possessing a different weapon for almost every day of the month. So complete were their requirements in this respect, that Dick very quickly jumped to the conclusion that no

two men could possibly find use for them all. It was much more reasonable to believe that others, beside the two brothers, had an interest in them, and that this cabin was used as a meeting place—if not for Henderson's gang itself—for another band equally as bad.

"I'm about as safe here," Dick grimaced to himself, "as I would be sitting on a case of nitroglycerine. The best thing for me is to get away from here as quickly as possible."

From under his lowered brows, Baptiste La Lond, still feigning sleep, was secretly watching him. Dick felt the scrutiny through some intuitive sense, and became more and more uncomfortable. Another worry was caused by the younger La Lond, who, during his restless pacing to and fro, often passed behind Dick's chair. It would be very easy, Dick thought, for Phillip to spring forward and pinion his arms behind him. In fact, chancing to look across at the former messenger he intercepted a signal, a sly wink which might, had Dick been less on guard, easily have passed unnoticed. Dick turned almost completely around, just as Phillip came stealthily forward, preparing for a spring.

"When are we going to visit the trap-line, Phillip?" Dick inquired mockingly.

Phillip stopped suddenly, his face red with anger

and embarrassment. He turned and beat a hasty retreat, glowering from his corner as Dick rose and moved back his chair.

Then, as never before, Dick realized fully the seriousness of his position. Not for one moment could he relax his vigilance. His life itself depended upon extreme caution and, when it became necessary, swift action. But even by exercising the utmost care, sooner or later a little slip on his part might give the treacherous brothers the advantage they craved.

Dick rose to his feet, finally, and addressed the still drowsing messenger.

"La Lond," he stated in a clear, steady voice, "I've decided to go at once. I'm afraid it will be impossible for me to neglect my duty. It is too late in the afternoon to go back to Fort Good Faith, but I think I'll continue on my patrol, returning to the post late tomorrow afternoon or the morning following."

Baptiste, apparently, was sleeping with one ear open. Almost immediately he sprang to an upright position.

"No! No, monsieur!" he protested, waving his arms wildly about. "You must not go, I beg of you. Stop here for a time longer, monsieur."

But Dick shook his head.

"I must go," he declared firmly.

"But think, monsieur, eet will be veree late by ze time you get back to Fort Good Faith."

"I'll not go there tonight, as I just explained to you, and probably not tomorrow. I must finish my patrol."

La Lond's eyes blinked.

"Where do you go then?" he asked, evidently much relieved.

"That is a matter I have not yet decided," answered Dick. "I'm not very well acquainted with the country hereabouts, and I've been wondering if you'll be kind enough to direct me to the nearest dwelling."

"Yes, certainly, monsieur, I will be veree glad."

His sudden great eagerness to assist him did not escape Dick's attention. He knew very well what Baptiste would say, and he had no intention of following any suggestions of the bandit as to where he should go. It was easy to guess where the wily messenger would send him—to Henderson's camp probably, or, if not there, to the house of some other crook in the outlaw's employ.

"I have a friend who live seex miles from here," said La Lond. "Ze trail ees veree easy to his house. You must go zere."

"All right, I'll do as you say," agreed Dick, "but first you must be very careful in directing me so that I do not get lost."

"Et ees easy to tell, monsieur. You will not get lost," the messenger shrugged his shoulders expressively. "Two mile down ze leetle creek to ze first turn to ze right, zen four mile straight ahead to my friend's house. Not possibly can you miss et, monsieur."

"So that is where Henderson is camped," exulted Dick to himself. "The information may be valuable to Corporal Richardson."

"Thank you very much," he said to Baptiste.

"Et ees nothing," La Lond blinked wickedly.

Phillip had suddenly come to life again and was treading soft-footed across the floor. From the corner of one eye, Dick watched him. Then Baptiste shuffled farther to one side, probably with the intention of preventing Dick from observing his brother's sly movements. Not to be outdone in this clumsy fashion, Dick took a step in the opposite direction, just in time to see Phillip approach the fireplace and the rack of guns close by.

"You will find ze place without difficulty," declared Baptiste in a loud voice, attempting to attract attention to himself. "I tell you, monsieur, my friend he

ees veree good host. So joll-ee, so kind, monsieur. You will not regret."

Dick whipped his revolver from his holster and sprang back just in time.

"Put down that gun," he shouted to Phillip. "Put it down, I say!"

Phillip's weapon clattered to the floor, and his hands clawed at the empty air above his head. At that particular moment he was a very much frightened and surprised young man. His cheeks were white as the drifts of snow outside. Baptiste turned, his face crimson with fury.

"Fool! Fool!" he screamed, rushing forward and cuffing the shivering culprit about the face and head. Then he turned apologetically to Dick.

"Pardon, monsieur," he whimpered. "Mon Dieu! I am stricken! Ze boy ees mad. Perhaps you notice et before, monsieur. I intend to tell you ze truth when first you came, but there ees always ze shame an' ze pride. You understand me, monsieur."

"Yes, I understand you," Dick replied coldly. "Believe me, I'll know exactly what to expect from you in future. One false move from either one of you, and I won't hesitate about using this nice little plaything here in my hands. Stand aside!"

Baptiste obeyed quickly as Dick backed slowly to the door, opened it and went quickly out. His pulses

were pounding and his hand trembled as he returned the gun to its holster.

"Close shave!" he muttered to himself. "I guess I was pretty lucky that time."

At a dog trot, he hurried along the foot-path, leading to the creek.

CHAPTER VII

FLIGHT THROUGH THE WOODS

A VERY alert and still somewhat frightened young man in the person of Dick Kent hurried across the small creek he had commenced following a few hours before, and struck off through the heavy forest of spruce and poplar, which lay between him and Fort Good Faith.

In spite of the fact that travelling was now more difficult, Dick made remarkably good time. The thought uppermost in his mind was to put as many miles between him and the treacherous Baptiste as possible, to go on with undiminished speed until darkness came to prevent further progress.

Pursuit would be almost certain, Dick reasoned. The two brothers, smarting under their recent thwarted attempt to take Dick prisoner, would be anxious to even the score.

"They'll be wild," Dick grinned to himself, "and angry enough to boil me in oil if ever I fall in their hands again."

He chuckled as he visualized the picture of Baptiste and Phillip, quarreling amongst themselves over the miscarriage of their plans. By the time they had fought out the verbal battle and had got down to the real business of recapturing their slippery guest, Dick hoped he would have several miles to his credit, and would be able to retain the lead.

He had been unwise in accepting the hospitality offered by Baptiste, yet in so doing he had made several important discoveries. One was that the cabin, occupied by the two brothers, afforded a meeting place for the band of criminals, then infesting the country, and a second, that either Henderson himself or other members of the band could be found in the place to which Baptiste had directed him.

Dick pondered over this information as he hurried on. He recalled what Corporal Richardson had told him regarding the operations of a large criminal organization there in the North, and he was quite sure the mounted police would welcome any news of their movements or places of abode. He remembered also what Richardson had said about the connection between the fur thieves and Henderson's outlaws. The corporal believed that they were one and the same—all under the leadership of Henderson. If this supposition were correct, then the La Lond cabin was just as apt to be a meeting place or rendezvous

for the men who had stolen the map of the lost mine, as for the fur thieves themselves.

Sooner or later, reasoned Dick, the scar-faced Indian would show up at one or the other of the two places of which he, Dick, had knowledge. Probably right now the possessor of the map was somewhere in that very neighborhood. Having escaped Malemute Slade, what would be more natural than that he should immediately proceed to Henderson's camp to report his good fortune.

Dick paused abruptly at the thought, his pulses pounding with excitement. In a high state of tension he strode forward, brushed the snow from a small, broken stump, and sat down to think it all out.

"I've a good notion to throw caution to the winds," he confided to himself, gulping a handful of snow, "and go right back at once. They won't be expecting me. Anyway, it'll be dark by the time I return to the La Lond cabin. It will be comparatively safe then. I'll reconnoitre a bit, find out if Baptiste and Phillip are still there, and, if they're not, I'll slip over to Henderson's. I've just got a hunch that the scar-faced Indian has returned."

Dick had never been placed in a similar position, and found it very difficult to decide. Reason told him that it would be the height of folly to embark upon any such enterprise. But in Dick's veins was

the hot, adventurous blood of youth. Here was a chance in a thousand to win back the ground which had been lost. He would find the scar-faced Indian and endeavor to recover the map.

He had risen to his feet for the express purpose of proceeding to carry out his foolhardy plan, when quite unexpectedly there rang in his ears a former statement of Corporal Richardson:

"You'd make a mighty poor soldier, Dick . . . . a soldier's first duty is obedience."

Was this obedience? He had been warned to keep away from all human habitation, to be careful not to expose himself needlessly—to shun men! And now—— A slow flush of shame mounted to his forehead. Hang it all, what an imbecile he was. So far he had obeyed none of the commands of his superior. He had—or very nearly had—violated them all. At every turn, instead of doing the right thing, he had done the wrong thing. He was not worthy of Corporal Richardson's or any other man's trust. Even Sandy, younger than he, nor half as strong physically, would never have been guilty of such willful disobedience.

It was a more sober and earnest young man who faced resolutely about and continued the trek eastward towards Fort Good Faith. The silence of the great forest lay about him. Shadows had length-

ened, the sun had slipped down out of sight, the cooler breath of evening stung color in his cheeks and tickled his nostrils with tiny particles of frost.

"I'll go on for an hour before stopping to make camp for the night," he decided.

He felt more tired now as he resumed his lonely and monotonous journey. Crossing a narrow valley, thickly studded with clumps of red willow and saskatoon, he commenced scrambling up a sharp incline, until finally he reached a wide plateau. Here, except for an occasional stunted jack-pine, there were no trees. Huge boulders and queer looking rocks, most of them covered thickly with snow, gave a weird appearance to the place.

The wind had full sweep across the plateau. It was bitterly cold here, so cold indeed that even the heavy fur jacket and parka, worn by the mounted police, failed to keep out the insidious penetrating frost. Dick beat his arms against his shivering body and stumbled on across that desolate plain, anxiously scanning the darkening prospect ahead. He hoped that he would come soon to the more friendly forest, where, when a stop became necessary, he could gather wood and kindle a fire. But out there ahead he could see nothing except a long and weary stretch of country covered with snow and bristling with rocks, a

land indescribably lonely and terrible just then in the rapidly gathering darkness.

Fully an hour passed before he had traversed the plateau and had come again to the welcome woodland. Breathing a sigh of relief, he started down the slope, faintly outlined in the gloom ahead. It was so steep here that Dick had difficulty in keeping his balance. He slid, stumbled, now and again reaching out for a young sapling to aid him in his somewhat precipitous descent. He had almost reached the bottom when he felt himself being thrown violently forward, falling in a crumpled heap at the foot of a large spruce. A stab of pain in his right ankle, and Dick momentarily lost consciousness.

He realized presently what had happened. The thong of the snowshoe on his right foot had become caught in a snag of brush and had tripped him. His fall had been heavy, but Dick did not become aware of the full extent of his injury until he attempted to rise.

It was useless. His right ankle throbbed with a sickening pain. A bad fracture or torn ligaments—he was not sure which—made it absolutely impossible for him to put any weight at all upon that foot.

A sudden, horrible fear overcame him. In the first moment of weakness, a terror-stricken sob

broke from his lips. Here he was absolutely helpless, without wood, water or fire, without shelter of any kind, in weather so bitterly cold that in a few hours time, lying there inactive, he would be frozen as stiff as a block of ice.

Not entirely to Dick's discredit, he cried like a child, one arm flung out, the other pillowed under him. He lay there, his body shaking with ill-suppressed grief. Face blanched with terror, he sat up finally staring about him with tragic eyes. Everywhere around was deep and utter silence. To all appearances, there was no life anywhere in that dead waste of snow, in that land of bitter, penetrating cold.

And then, suddenly, far away, he heard the familiar wolf-cry. Long and mournful it was, and Dick shivered, remembering a former occasion when he, Sandy and Corporal Richardson and Toma had very nearly given their lives to a hungry pack in the vicinity of the Big Smoky. If there was anything on earth which Dick feared, hated and despised, it was a wolf. Whenever he heard the eerie cry of this species of human hunters in the North, his hair fairly bristled from panic and indignation. In his present predicament, it was the very thing required to put strength and determination in his heart. Groaning in the effort, he rose dizzily to his knees and

commenced to scoop away the snow with his hands.

By dint of hard work, he had soon cleared a fairly wide space around him. The exercise had warmed his body and kept his mind from dwelling too much on the seriousness of his plight. From a bush nearby, he gathered an armful of twigs, and from a dead, fallen tree, just beyond the big spruce, sufficient dry bark and moss to start his fire. In an hour's time, considerably cheered and comforted, he was brewing tea over a roaring blaze.

"Things are not as bad as I thought," Dick was forced to admit to himself a few minutes later as he gulped down a cup of hot tea and ate sparingly from his supply of emergency rations. "As long as I can crawl around on my hands and knees, I can manage somehow to gather enough wood to keep myself from freezing. By eating very little and drinking plenty of snow water, I can stay here for a week if necessary. After that——"

What would happen after that, Dick did not dare even to conjecture. The thought was too appalling. But surely his ankle would become strong again before a week had elapsed.

"It's only a bad sprain," he endeavored to reassure himself. "Perhaps even by tomorrow I'll be able to hobble around."

He settled back with a smile on his face and

stretched out full length before the blaze. Worn out, mentally and physically, he soon drowsed lightly, only to be awakened by the wolf-cry again, a blood-curdling howl, which pierced the deep silence in the forest space around him.

"Great Caesar!" sputtered Dick, sitting bolt upright and staring out balefully in the intense darkness. "Troubles never come singly. If I had my hands on the neck of that brute, I'd choke him into silence and insensibility."

For a brief space he stared, then abruptly his eyes opened wide in astonishment. Out of the velvety blackness, beyond the circle of light made by his campfire, there emerged two fur-coated figures carrying rifles. Slowly, confidently, they came on—in their approach exercising not even the slightest caution.

Dick turned his head indifferently and gazed quietly into the fire. What did he care for the brothers La Lond now? As well die at their hands as to stay here to be eaten by wolves. He did not even look up as the treacherous pair stepped forward within the narrow space he had cleared with his own hands.

"Dick!" shouted a familiar voice.

In wonderment, almost in a stupor, Dick looked up into the smiling, joyful faces of Sandy and Toma.

CHAPTER VIII

TRACKS IN THE SNOW

"How," inquired Dick in bewilderment, "did you ever manage to find me here?"

Sandy sat down and put one arm around Dick's shoulders.

"You miserable, deceiving old rascal," he threatened, "if I could have got my hands on you this morning, when I discovered the scurvy trick you and Corporal Richardson had played upon me, you'd never be able to walk over another trail again. I really mean it, Dick. I think it was the most unfriendly act you have ever committed. If I wasn't just naturally patient and forgiving by nature, you and I would never have seen each other again."

"What would have happened to you?" grinned Dick.

Before replying, Sandy winked broadly and goodhumoredly at Toma.

"I had a blamed good notion to go right out and join forces with the Henderson gang. They need

a lot of new blood now that Corporal Richardson has taken so many of 'em into camp. Four dog teams and eight men! Just think of it, Dick! He captured the whole outfit—lock, stock and barrel—single-handed."

"And the stolen fur?" Dick questioned breathlessly.

"He got that too," answered Sandy, glad of the chance to tell the story. "But first of all, I'm going to start at the beginning. Three hours after you set out over the Run River trail, Toma and I, who were looking out of the window and suspecting nothing, saw the four dog teams coming into view. There is nothing unusual about a dog team up here in this country, so we weren't much interested. I had just turned away from the window to start another search for you and the corporal—somehow, I hadn't gotten over the idea that you were skulking somewhere about the place—when Toma poked me in the ribs. Dick, I wish you could have seen it. It all happened so suddenly that no one knew just what was up."

"Yes! Yes!" said Dick a little impatiently. "Go on, Sandy. What happened?"

"They were just opposite us, travelling along merrily, when a man slipped out of the brush on the far side of the trail, holding something in each hand.

They must have been startled all right. Corporal Richardson told me afterward that they were taken completely by surprise. At any rate," Sandy went on, "the dog teams stopped and eight men stepped forward with their arms in the air. It was a regular hold-up."

Sandy paused for breath.

"Both Toma and I very naturally jumped to the conclusion that the person who had committed the hold-up was a bandit, probably in the employ of Henderson. So we grabbed our rifles and hurried out to help. We ran straight over in the direction of the dog teams, firing our rifles as we went and yelling like mad."

"You see," explained Sandy, "we thought that the bandit would become frightened and start running away. But," admitted the young Scotchman, a little shamefacedly, "he didn't run. He stood right there like a statue, keeping those men covered. All the time we kept getting closer and closer, until finally Toma poked me in the ribs again and told me to stop firing—that the bandit was Corporal Richardson himself."

In spite of the discomfort and pain he endured, Dick roared with laughter.

"What did Corporal Richardson say?" he asked.

Sandy smiled at the recollection.

"When we came up, he stared at us coldly.

" 'If you two young fools have finished with your celebration,' he said, 'you'll please take charge of these dog teams while the rest of us gentlemen retire to the post.'

"That's all there is to tell you, I guess, except that Corporal Richardson locked the men up in a big room at Fort Good Faith and that we stored all the stolen fur in the company's warehouse. Afterwards, when the corporal had cooled off and was a little more friendly towards me, he told me where you had gone and about the plan you had employed to deceive Henderson's spies."

"I tell you, Dick," Sandy went on, "you can't imagine how much the corporal likes you. He seemed worried stiff for fear that something might happen to you. Finally, after we had bothered him a lot, he gave us permission to go out and try to find you."

"You found me all right," Dick was forced to admit, "but I don't see how you ever managed to do it."

"It was easy enough—for Toma. He found your tracks where you left the Run River trail and we followed them up to a house."

"The house of La Lond," said Dick.

"I don't know whose house it was. It was almost

dark when we got there. My plan was to walk right up, knock at the door and ask for you, but Toma thought differently."

"Bad men him live there," interrupted Toma, moving closer to the fire. "I know him Baptiste for bad fellow. Me see that man many times an' no like at all. I 'fraid mebbe he kill you an' hide body. So I listen at door. I find out something."

"What did you find out?" asked Dick.

"Me find out you been there an' go 'way again. Baptiste very mad an' talk in loud voice. He say I kill him that fellow bye-'n'-bye. Drink much rum an' shout all time. No have trouble to listen."

Sandy started to speak but Dick motioned to him to be silent. He was anxious to learn what the young Indian had found out, and wanted to hear the story from the lips of Toma himself.

"Did he mention the name of Henderson at all?" he inquired.

Toma nodded. "Yes," he answered, "him talk about Henderson too. Him say he go see Henderson pretty soon. Then get scouting party an' find you where you hide in the woods. Talk like Henderson no live very far away."

"That's exactly what I wanted to make sure of," Dick explained to Sandy, "and I'm almost certain that I know where the outlaw's camp is."

"Did you see the camp?" asked Sandy.

Dick shook his head. "No, I didn't see it. Baptiste told me where it was."

"But why did he do that? I should think he'd want to keep its location a secret."

"He wanted me to go there and directed me to the place because he knew that the moment I walked into the outlaw's camp Henderson would either kill me at once or make me his prisoner."

In a few words Dick related his experiences at the house of the Brothers La Lond, of his escape, and, finally, of the accident that had befallen him.

"You're hurt!" cried Sandy, suddenly jumping up. "Why, Dick, you should have told us before."

The faces of Sandy and Toma were very grave as they stooped to untie his moccasin and examine the injured foot.

"Very bad sprain," said Toma, straightening up. "I help you fix him, so after while you feel very much better. Sandy," he ordered, turning to his still gaping companion, "you start build shelter right away. You, me work all night mebbe to make nice warm place. Dick stay here with bad foot one, two days, I think."

In less than an hour, his foot properly attended to, Dick was resting more easily. Around him a shelter was being hurriedly constructed. He could hear

Sandy and the young Indian guide walking back and forth, gathering huge arm-loads of brush, spruce boughs and moss, occasionally calling out to each other in bantering tones. The fire, which had been replenished, blazed brightly in front of the opening of the shelter. Its welcome heat succeeded in making Dick drowsy and presently he fell asleep.

When he awoke on the following morning, he rubbed his eyes in astonishment. All about him was the green, circular wall of a large tepee, so closely woven together with spruce boughs and moss that it was impossible to see even the faintest shaft of light coming through from the outside. The opening had been hung with a small blanket, but, what astonished Dick more than anything else, was that the fire, which had formerly been outside, was now inside the shelter. Smoke from an arm-load of burning branches rose straight up, escaping through a vent at the top of the tepee.

The shelter was warm and cozy, fragrant with the smell of spruce. Over the fire a small kettle of snow water was bubbling merrily. Dick threw back the four-point Hudson's Bay blanket, which covered him, and clapped his hands with delight. What a miracle Toma and Sandy had wrought during the night! They had worked like Trojans to make things pleasant and comfortable for him.

He wondered where they were now. Except for the crackling of the fire and the sound of the water boiling in the kettle, there was nothing whatsoever to break the deep hush of that winter morning. He sat up and endeavored to examine his ankle. It felt better, he thought. There was no pain worth mentioning, and he was quite sure the swelling had gone down.

"I don't mind staying here in the least," he informed himself, twisting around and making his way over to the inviting blaze. "It will be great sport to live in a green wigwam like this with Sandy and Toma for company."

A dull tramping in the snow outside, caused him to raise his head and turn his eyes toward the opening. The blanket was pushed aside and Sandy appeared, crawling on hands and knees, trailing his rifle and a large rabbit. Toma, who entered immediately behind, had two rabbits and a ptarmigan. The eyes of the two youthful hunters glowed from the excitement and pleasure of their successful foray.

"We eat good breakfast," Toma announced, holding out the rabbits and ptarmigan for Dick's inspection.

"When did you wake up?" Sandy wanted to know. "Thought you'd sleep for an hour yet."

"It's wonderful!" Dick voiced his appreciation and nearly choked in the effort. "You fellows are certainly two good pals. When I woke up I could scarcely believe my eyes."

"It took us nearly all night," said Sandy. "I don't suppose I could ever have done it alone. Of course, I don't need to tell you that Toma was the architect."

"My people build 'em like that many times," Toma modestly explained. "Plenty warm even when weather very cold. See many like that on Indian trap-line."

"How long were you away hunting?" Dick asked.

"About an hour, I think. Game seems to be fairly plentiful around here. And, O Dick!——" Sandy paused as he turned somewhat eagerly toward his friend, "a mile from here, just across a narrow ravine, Toma came across snowshoe tracks. He says they were made by a white man."

"Baptiste or Phillip," guessed Dick, shivering a little.

Toma shook his head.

"Me no think so. Tracks at least two days old. Some white man he go by here day before yesterday."

"But how," sceptically inquired Dick, "do you know it was a white man? Surely you're not able

to tell that. Are the tracks so very much different?"

The Indian guide laughed as he nodded his head in the affirmative.

"Easy to tell. White man no use 'em snow shoes same like Indian. Tracks turn out. Indian tracks go straight ahead."

"I think there's something in it," Sandy volunteered, "because after Toma had told me, while we were still out there on the trail, I noticed that Toma's tracks were different from mine."

Although still a little sceptical, Dick was sufficiently well acquainted with Toma and his ability and prowess, not to doubt that the Indian lad might be correct in his surmise. Very rarely, indeed, did Toma err in matters of this kind. A natural-born tracker and scout, versed in the ways of the wilderness, he had often startled his two young friends by his almost unlimited knowledge of wood-lore.

"And that isn't all," Sandy's voice broke the lull in their conversation. "We discovered something else besides those tracks. I almost hate to tell you, Dick."

"What was it?" his friend asked wonderingly.

"Blood stains!" Sandy enlightened him. "The man's tracks were sprinkled here and there with tiny red spots. He must have been hurt or wounded, Dick. It makes me shiver to think about it."

"Perhaps he was carrying some animal he had killed," suggested Dick.

Again Toma shook his head.

"No," he stated with conviction, "man hurt very bad. Him not go many miles like that. Toma feel plenty sorry for that man."

In alarm, Dick looked from one to the other of his two friends. A hurt or wounded man out there on the trail alone—it made him feel weak and sick himself. He recalled his own helplessness and horror on the previous night, when he had fallen and sprained his ankle.

"Isn't there something we can do?" he finally blurted out. "Just think what it may mean, Sandy."

Sandy did not answer. Neither did Toma. The three boys were looking at each other now in a gloomy silence.

"You mustn't forget your own condition, Dick," Sandy reminded him. "We can't leave you here alone, can we?"

"One of you could go after we've had breakfast. Why couldn't you, Toma?" He turned appealingly to the Indian guide. "What do you say?"

To Dick's surprise, Toma drew back and raised one arm in a gesture of protest.

"What you think poor Toma make crazy altogether?" he inquired. "Sandy an' me both stay here

to fight 'em Henderson's men when they come. What good you think just one against two, three, four—mebbe six, ten men?" he demanded hotly.

It was, indeed, a poser. Dick sat with his head in his hands and Sandy turned wearily away to commence the preparation of breakfast.

CHAPTER IX

THE COUNCIL OF WAR

BREAKFAST was over and three very sober young men sat down to what Sandy described as a council of war.

"We must make some sort of a plan right away," he stated. "First thing we know Henderson will be here to catch us napping."

Sandy's brow wrinkled at the very unpleasant thought.

"Now my proposal is that each one of us make a suggestion. Then the three of us will consider these suggestions one by one and try to pick flaws in them. Maybe out of the three suggestions we can build some sort of working plan."

"All right, you're number one," smiled Dick. "What is your plan?"

Sandy flushed with embarrassment.

"Look here, Dick, not so fast. Give me a little time please. You know blamed well that I haven't had an opportunity to think yet."

"What about you, Toma?"

The Indian guide stirred uneasily and licked his dry lips. From his look of detachment, it was quite evident that he had been deeply engrossed in his own thoughts for quite a long time. He stared blankly at Dick.

"What you mean?" he asked.

"We're trying to think of some way to fool Henderson," Dick patiently explained. "What are we going to do, Toma? We can't sit here all day just waiting for something to happen."

"Only way I think of is for me go down trail in direction La Lond's house. Bye-'n'-bye when Henderson come, I hide in bush and shoot rifle. Henderson stop. He not know what to do. Mebbe he think man in bush is you, Dick. He come after me an' I keep shoot all time, but all time me I run very fast. No can catch. I keep lead him away more all time from this camp."

Dick and Sandy clapped their hands enthusiastically.

"Very good," Dick complimented Toma. "Your plan's so original that I don't think we can improve on it."

"I can improve on it," boasted Sandy. "You see, Dick there is one weak spot in his plan. Henderson will be sure to catch sight of Toma, no matter how

careful he is about hiding and shooting from cover. And once he sees him, he'll know right away that it isn't you—because you're wearing the uniform of the mounted police."

"You right," admitted Toma. "I never thought of that."

"And so you think that Henderson will realize right away that Toma isn't the man he wants, and will keep right on coming?" asked Dick.

"That's it," Sandy answered. "Toma may check him, but he won't stop him. Henderson will very likely divide his force, sending part of his men after Toma and the rest down here. It won't be very difficult for him to follow the trail the three of us have made."

"No, of course, it won't," agreed Dick.

"There's only one way to make Toma's plan absolutely water-tight and fool-proof," continued Sandy, "and it's as simple as A, B, C."

"Prove it," challenged Dick. "I guess I don't understand you."

"Easy enough," Sandy enlightened him. "Put your uniform on Toma. That little trick will work just as well now as it did in the case of the fur thieves."

"Whew!" Dick whistled. "Honestly, Sandy, there are moments when you show indications of real

genius. At other times you're so hopelessly imbecile that it makes me tremble to think what will become of you."

"Easy there!" ordered the person both complimented and accused, throwing a chip at Dick's head. "You and Toma are nearly the same size. The uniform will fit well enough for our purposes. If there aren't any more suggestions, we'd better get busy."

In a few minutes more the uniform had again changed hands. Toma put it on with a feeling of awe and reverence, that was only natural in one who, since infancy, had been taught to respect and revere the men who wore it.

"You look fine, Toma," said Dick, "and I haven't the least doubt but that you'll make a much better mounted policeman than I did."

"I try be better," Toma stated simply, which assertion brought a laugh from Sandy.

"Before you go," smiled Dick, "I think we'd better have some sort of an understanding. How far are you going down the trail before you stop to wait for Henderson, and how long will you wait there if he doesn't come along right away?"

"I go down trail about four miles," answered the guide, "an' wait until dark. Him no come at all if no come by dark, I think."

"I don't think so either," Sandy cut in. "You'd better not stay out too late, Toma. Return as quickly as you can after night comes."

"Another thing," Dick spoke again, "I wouldn't fire at Henderson's men until after they had fired at you. Show yourself from a safe distance and let them do most of the shooting. Besides, you know as well as I do, Toma, that a real mounted policeman never fires from ambush."

With the words of his friends still ringing in his ears, Toma crawled through the narrow opening and a moment later was gone. Dick and Sandy sat motionless.

"I'd like to be in his shoes," Sandy finally broke forth, "and I'm sorry now that I didn't go along."

"That would be foolish. Toma can look after himself."

"But I feel like a fool sitting here and doing nothing."

"Go out and hunt for some more rabbits," suggested Dick. "You don't need to bother about me. I feel that I am perfectly safe here now. I have a lot of confidence in Toma and the plan he and you so cleverly worked out. Why don't you go, Sandy?"

Sandy opened his clasp-knife and commenced to whittle on a stick.

"I would, only I hate to leave you here alone. It

would be pretty lonesome for you just sitting or lying here with nothing to occupy your mind."

"I have plenty of things to think about," Dick replied. "So don't let that worry you. Why don't you go?" he repeated.

"If I do go, it won't be on a hunting trip."

"Why?"

Sandy threw down the stick and put away his hunting knife. He rose to his feet.

"Do you know, Dick, I keep thinking about that man out there—the one who was hurt. Do you suppose that—that something has happened to him?"

"I've been thinking about him too," Dick confessed. "It's terrible, isn't it, Sandy?" He paused as he drew himself to a more upright position. "But I imagine," he continued hopelessly, "that he's beyond help now. Toma said that he wouldn't go very far."

Sandy strode forward and put one hand on Dick's head.

"Do you suppose, Dick——" he began, then paused abruptly.

Smiling, Dick looked up.

"I know what you are going to say, Sandy. You feel that it's our duty to try and do something. But you are hesitating on my account. You'd like to

follow those tracks and see if you can find the man." Dick seized Sandy's hand and gave it a re-assuring squeeze. "It's exactly what I hoped you'd want to do. Hop to it, Sandy."

"I'll return before dark," promised the other, his face lighting up with pleasure.

"Don't get lost," cautioned Dick.

"Of course, I won't. I have a better sense of direction than I used to have, and I'm a lot more careful too."

Sandy stooped down and picked up his shoulder-pack. He was eager now and worked hurriedly assembling his kit.

"Take two or three days rations with you," Dick ordered. "You never can tell what will happen."

Sandy complied willingly enough. He turned to bid Dick good-bye.

"Don't worry about me," he said cheerfully. "I'll be all right. I'll return safe and sound, depend on that."

Then, almost before he realized it, Dick was alone. He sat staring at the green, thatched walls of his little prison, disconsolately kicking, with his uninjured foot, at the tangled mat of moss and dead leaves at the side of his bed. Hours would pass before either of his two friends would return. The

day would drag itself along, seeming never to come to an end. If there was only something he could do to make time slip away more quickly.

For an hour or more, he cleaned and polished his rifle, pausing now and again to crawl over and put a stick of wood on the fire. By carefully conserving the wood, which Toma and Sandy had gathered on the previous night, there would be sufficient to last for quite a long time.

A little later, putting down his rifle, his gaze fell upon the two rabbits and ptarmigan Toma had brought in. The one rabbit, which Sandy had killed, they had eaten for breakfast. Securing his hunting knife, Dick worked his way across the tepee and commenced to skin and dress the game they had been so fortunate in obtaining.

Having completed this task, Dick went to the opening for snow, which he melted in a kettle over the fire. It was necessary to make many of these trips before he had sufficient water for drinking purposes and for the rabbit-stew he had decided upon. Thus occupied, he contrived to keep himself in a cheerful frame of mind. Staying here alone was not really as monotonous as he had expected.

After he had prepared a light lunch and had drunk several cups of tea, he retired to his bunk and soon fell asleep. When he awoke, it was with the con-

sciousness of being chilly and uncomfortable. Turning his head, he perceived, with a start, that the fire had gone out. It was now quite dark inside the tepee, and looking up he was astonished to see several stars peeping down at him through the smoke-vent.

"I must have slept a long time," thought Dick, scrambling to a sitting position and preparing to crawl over to rekindle the fire.

In a few minutes a bright blaze sprang up under his hand and in a few minutes more, piling on brush and sticks, he had driven the chill from the room. He was in the act of placing the rabbit-stew over the fire, when the blanket, covering the opening, was pushed unceremoniously aside and Toma entered.

"Hello, you old rascal!" shouted Dick. "This is luck. You made a quick trip of it."

Toma grinned broadly as he approached the fire and commenced to remove his parka and coat.

"Plan work fine," he informed him. "Me fool Henderson good an' plenty, I guess. Make 'em run all through woods try and catch me. Shoot plenty of rifles an' make big noise. Bye-'n'-bye I give 'em slip an' come back here."

"You're a trump!" exulted his hearer. "I knew you could do it."

"Henderson him plenty sick by now," chuckled

Toma. "Go home like mad grizzly 'cause he no find mounted police."

The Indian guide stood for a moment, warming his hands over the fire.

"Where Sandy go?" he suddenly asked.

Dick flushed slightly under the direct, searching scrutiny. The truth was, he felt a little guilty about Sandy. After all, perhaps, he should not have permitted his friend to go.

"I'll tell you about it," said Dick, which he proceeded to do, wondering what Toma would say.

When Dick had concluded, the guide stood for several minutes silently contemplating the leaping flames at his feet. His face was expressionless—neither sober nor gay.

"No like," he declared finally, shaking his head. "No like Sandy go away alone. Him more young me an' you. Him little fellow. No stand much. Mebbe get lost."

"No," said Dick, endeavoring to reassure the young Indian and likewise himself, "Sandy will be perfectly all right. We don't need to worry."

But, as a matter of fact, both of them did worry. They ate supper in a gloomy mood, straining their ears for the sound of a familiar step. The hours passed, and still Sandy did not appear. When mid-

night came, Dick, nearly frantic, raised his head from his pillow, deciding to sit up.

"He no come yet," said Toma in a hushed voice.

Somewhere, fairly close at hand, they heard the howling of a wolf.

It was the only sound which, for many long hours, had broken the deep silence of the forest.

CHAPTER X

SANDY PLAYS A LONE HAND

"WAKE up! Wake up!"

A light was shining in Dick's face and he was being shaken roughly by the shoulders. Something had fallen near the bed—a dull clatter of some sort. Then a voice raised slightly, then more voices, and, presently, as Dick half-sat, half-reclined on his spruce couch, endeavoring to rub the sleep from his eyes and collect his befuddled senses, he perceived what seemed to be at first a miracle.

The tepee was full of people. It seemed incredible, but true it was. The narrow confines of the room, in which he had spent the previous thirty-six hours, most of them alone, now fairly bustled with life. To his great amazement, he saw Sandy, Toma, Corporal Richardson, Factor MacClaren and two half-breeds, employed as servants at Fort Good Faith. They were all standing or sitting about, everyone, apparently, talking at once.

Dick made another quick dab at his eyes to make

sure that his vision had not suddenly played him false. Was he suffering from some sort of a delusion? Was he seeing and hearing things? What did it all mean?

"That boy could sleep through an earthquake," Sandy's uncle declared, detaching himself from the little group and walking over beside Dick. "My boy," he inquired, placing a solicitous hand on Dick's head, "how are you feeling? Sandy tells me that you have been quite seriously hurt."

For the third time, Dick rubbed at his eyes.

"What has happened?" he cried in a hollow, unnatural voice.

A general laugh followed this plaintive inquiry.

"It means," Corporal Richardson enlightened him, "that everything is all right, Dick. We've come to take you back to the post."

"But how——" began Dick.

"Sandy brought the news to us last night."

Dick turned reproachful eyes in the direction of his chum.

"I like your nerve," he said coldly, "and that's no joke either. You said you'd come back before dark, and all the time you were scheming and planning to sneak back to the post. .I suppose it didn't matter to you how much Toma and I worried."

"No such thing," Sandy retorted hotly. "I

wouldn't have gone back to the post at all if I hadn't come across Malemute Slade. I thought he was dying."

"Malemute Slade!" Dick stared incredulously.

"I think," Factor MacClaren broke in, "that you'd better let me straighten out this tangle."

"No, Uncle Walter," Sandy protested, "I can do that better myself." He walked over and sat down on the bed beside Dick.

"When I left here," he commenced, "you know what my intention was: to follow the tracks of the man who had been hurt and, if possible, to find him. Well, I had no difficulty in getting back to the place where Toma and I had been. The trail wasn't very hard to follow. There were blood-stains in the snow, and here and there, I could tell where the man had sat down to rest.

"I had been out on the trail—well, it couldn't have been much more than an hour—when the tracks led me to an old dilapidated-looking cabin. Right away, I had a feeling that the man would be there, and I had a horrible suspicion that I would find him dead.

"I knocked at the door," Sandy continued breathlessly, "but there was no answer. So I went in. I couldn't see anything at first, it was so dark inside. There was only one small window. But pretty soon my eyes became accustomed to the light. There was

a bunk, stove and two wooden benches in the room. A man was lying in the bunk with some blankets pulled around him.

"The wounded man had started a fire, but it had gone out and it was quite cold in the room. At first, I just stood there looking around, almost too frightened to move. When I walked over to the bunk, I was trembling all over. I had scarcely strength enough to pull down the blankets, which were tucked around the man's head."

Sandy paused and looked around him. His face was gray and drawn. Evidently, the memory was not a very pleasant one.

"The man," he resumed in a low voice, "was Malemute Slade."

Dick jumped.

"Sandy!" he cried in a stricken voice. "Don't tell me he's dead!"

"Of course not," smiled the speaker. "We wouldn't all be so blamed cheerful if he was. But when I found him, he was delirious, and I don't mind telling you that I was nearly frightened stiff.

"I was so excited, that I don't know exactly what I did. I remember starting the fire and trying to bathe his wound in some warm snow-water. He was wounded in his right arm, which was badly swollen and almost black from infection."

"Did Malemute Slade recognize you?" Dick asked.

"No, he was too sick for that. But he kept asking for water, sometimes sitting up and staring wildly about him. I gave him all the water he would drink, and late in the afternoon his fever subsided and he fell in a deep sleep.

"You can bet," Sandy went on, "that I had been doing a lot of thinking. I couldn't let him stay there like that. I was afraid he was going to die. I decided that the best thing I could do was to go back to the fort for help before it was too late.

"Shortly before dark, I banked my fire and started out. I knew I couldn't be very far from the Run River trail, probably not more than two miles west of it. I found the trail, after a good deal of trouble, and reached Fort Good Faith soon after midnight."

"Where is Malemute Slade now?" Dick wanted to know.

"He ought to be at the post by this time," Corporal Richardson replied. "As soon as Sandy appeared and told us the news, I called for a little party of volunteers and we started out. The cabin, where Malemute Slade lay wounded, is between here and the Run River trail, so, of course, we stopped there first, bundled him up and sent him back in a

hurry. Then we came on here for you, Dick. There is a dog team and sleigh waiting for you outside."

"I wonder how Slade happened to get wounded?" came Dick's next question.

"I don't know," the corporal replied. "We won't be able to find that out until Slade is sufficiently recovered to tell us. However, I know this: It's a bullet wound, and the weapon his assailant used was fired at close range. The hole in his arm is a large one. I'm afraid the bone is shattered."

"Will he get well again?" Dick asked.

"Yes; I think so. With proper care and attention, he'll be around again in a few weeks, although I doubt very much whether he'll be able to use his right arm for a long, long time."

"I'd like to get my hands on the man who shot him," Sandy stated belligerently.

Everybody laughed at this assertion except Toma, who had good cause to remember a certain experience only a few months before, when he had been somewhat roughly treated by the young Scotchman.

"Well, there's no use of wasting any more time here," said Factor MacClaren. "I suggest that we roll our friend, Dick, up in a nice little bundle and proceed on our way. Averse to a sleigh-ride, Dick?"

"Not at all."

"You may change your mind before we reach the

Run River trail," the factor warned him. "It's pretty rough in places."

"My foot's better, and I won't mind it at all," said Dick cheerfully.

The sun had just slipped up over the horizon when the small cavalcade, with Corporal Richardson in the lead, set out. In a short while, a brilliant flood of sunshine lay over the land. Out of the west came a warm chinook, stirring the spruce and pine branches over their heads.

"Spring is coming," rejoiced Sandy, sniffing the air and prancing about Dick's sleigh like a young colt. "Won't it be glorious, Dick, when the grass and flowers start to grow?"

"And the rivers and streams commence running again," Dick added. "We'll go fishing then, won't we, Sandy?"

"You bet!"

Sandy appeared to be so happy, indeed, that it occurred to Dick presently, watching him gamboling about, that there must be some other explanation for his friend's high spirits than the mere fact that Spring was approaching.

"What's up, Sandy?" he inquired a moment later as the young man came cavorting back to the sleigh. "Anyone would think that you'd just been elected King of Scotland."

"Nothing like that, Dick, on my word. I'm just feeling fine."

"Sandy, you're lying to me."

"Not I."

"You might as well tell me," persisted Dick, "because I'll be sure to find out anyway. I can tell by the way you act and by the expression on your face that something out of the ordinary has happened. Out with it!"

Sandy hesitated, then moved closer to his friend.

"It's not exactly a secret, but we thought we wouldn't tell you until we got back to the post. However, now that you've become so suspicious, I don't see any harm in it. Are you prepared for a shock?"

"Certainly. Go right ahead."

Sandy looked about him to make sure that they were not overheard, then leaned forward, as he walked beside the sleigh, and fairly hissed the words in Dick's ear:

"We've got back the map of the lost mine!"

"No!" shouted Dick.

"It's a fact. Corporal Richardson found it this morning on the body of Malemute Slade."

For a brief second, Dick stared incredulously, wonderingly at his friend, then removed his parka and threw it high in the air.

CHAPTER XI

OFF FOR THE MINE

On a bright Spring morning, nearly a month after the recovery of the map, a small but enthusiastic party of young prospectors left Fort Good Faith, and started north on its exciting quest. In the lead went Toma, the young Indian guide, and Dick Kent, now fully recovered from his recent injury. Sandy MacPherson and two Indian packers, Lee and Pierre, brought up the rear.

Three pack-horses, carrying supplies, blankets and equipment, trudged along behind the packers. They were heavily laden and, considering the fact that they had but recently come off the winter range, were in excellent condition.

The route Dick and his friends followed was a narrow trail, which threaded its way north by a little west through a practically unexplored and uninhabited country. By following the trail, the party would, in a few days, cross a low range of hills and emerge upon a trackless, broken plain. This plain, according

to the map, sloped away in a northwesterly direction to Thunder River.

Thunder River, although not the boys' final objective, was yet not very far away from the location, presumed or real, of the lost mine. The map was not very clear on this point. The small "X," indicating the position of the mine, had been placed the fractional part of an inch on the west side of Thunder River. Whether the distance between the river and the mine was one mile or ten, there was no way of ascertaining.

The boys conversed animatedly as they proceeded slowly along the trail. The weather was mild. Here and there, were a few discolored patches of snow. The ground was moist and cold, dotted with pools of water or streaked with tiny rivulets that trickled audibly away to join other streams in the steaming forest spaces beyond.

At exactly twelve o'clock by Dick's watch, the party came to a halt for its midday meal. After consulting the two packers, Dick had chosen a small bluff, thickly covered with dry grass and almost devoid of trees, as the best spot for the picketing out of the ponies. They could feed and rest here for an hour.

"I've an appetite myself," Sandy declared. He stood, watching the two Indian boys, Pierre and Lee,

remove the packs from the hungry little steeds and stake them out near the top of the bluff.

Dick and Toma had already started a fire. The latter was carrying an armful of brush, considerably larger than himself, and Dick, squatting on his haunches, hunting knife in hand, was carving thick slices of steak from a hind-quarter of moose he had fetched from the unloaded packs. He looked up at Sandy's approach.

"Here you, old lazybones, get a stir on if you expect to eat with the rest of us. Just now I require two frying-pans, salt, kettle and a liberal supply of water from that creek over yonder. You'll find bannock in the large canvas bag, tied with the yellow string."

"I was just planning to put myself to work when you mentioned it," Sandy retorted. "Gee, but I'm hungry. I know blamed well from the way I feel that our four-months' supplies won't last us more than a week."

He trotted away without waiting to hear what Dick's answer might be, and in considerably less than half an hour the boys were seated around the camp fire, eating their savory meal. At its conclusion, Dick stretched himself out at full length, basking in the warm noonday sun.

"Well, Sandy," he exulted, "we're away to a start at last. Aren't you glad?"

"You bet I am," came the hearty answer as the youngest member of the expedition sprawled down beside his friend. "The only thing I'm sorry about is that Uncle Walter couldn't come along with us. He's taking inventory at the store, and it'll be several weeks before he'll be ready to start."

"A good thing in one way," commented Dick. "When he comes he'll bring another string of pack-horses and more supplies."

"Corporal Richardson and Malemute Slade promised to pay us a visit too," Sandy reminded him. "What were you three doing together last night?" he suddenly demanded, sitting up and glowering down at the other.

"You think I'm secretive and selfish, I suppose," Dick replied, "but really there wasn't anything so very mysterious about our little meeting. You could have come into the room where we were if you had cared to. I motioned to you when you passed down the hallway, but you pretended not to see. You're terribly stubborn at times, Sandy."

"Not at all," Sandy protested. "But I feel like this: I wouldn't for the world attempt to intrude where I'm not wanted. You and Corporal Richard-

son and Malemute Slade went into that room without saying a word to me. Not a word!"

The aggrieved young man carefully broke off the brown stem of a withered pea-vine and crumpled it between the palms of his hands.

"As usual you weren't around when we wanted you," explained Dick. "I looked everywhere. But as I said before, there was no particular secret between us except—" Dick lowered his voice— "except that, at Corporal Richardson's suggestion, we made a second copy of the map. He took the copy and put it in the inside pocket of his coat. In a day or two, when he returns to headquarters, he's going to hand it over to the Inspector for safe-keeping.

"You can see for yourself," Dick resumed, "that it was a wise precaution. If the map we have with us should be lost or stolen, we'll still be able to find the mine."

"Yes," agreed Sandy, now fully recovered from his pique, "the plan was a good one. The Inspector will give us the other copy if we lose ours. A little delay, that's all."

"Just the same, I hope we don't lose the map again. I'll be pleased if nothing happens this time. I'd like to make good time getting over to the mine."

That Dick's wish gave every promise of being fulfilled, became more and more apparent as the days

passed. So far the little cavalcade had not been molested. Through deep forests and across broad, seemingly endless meadows they plodded hopefully, making very good progress. It seemed to Dick that one rare and glorious day followed another. The sun shone almost incessantly—a great, yellow, burning disc,—that had begun to work miracles in the land, which only a few weeks before had been gripped in the mighty hand of an implacable winter.

Continuing north and west, the country through which they passed became more rugged and difficult. The trail they had followed came to an end. There was no track, no outstanding landmark of any kind to guide them. For five dismal days, consulting their compass from time to time, the three boys with their packers and ponies struggled on over the scarred and battered face of a land of utter desolation. Gray, towering, misshapen rocks, rising up on every side, seemed to offer them mute defiance.

"It's as if they dared us to go on," Sandy remarked. "I'm getting so I hate the sight of them. I wonder, Dick, if we'll ever manage to get through?"

"Of course, we will," Dick replied cheerily enough, although at heart he was troubled. They could get through all right, they themselves, but the packhorses——

He looked around at the struggling little beasts,

who were slipping and sliding over the treacherous slate and granite formation underfoot. Their hoofs had been worn smooth as glass. One of them had become lame and part of its burden had been transferred to the other ponies and to the weary, chafed shoulders of the boys.

Since morning the two packers, Lee and Pierre, had shown the first symptoms of open rebellion. Neither one could speak English, so their complaints came to Dick and Sandy through the medium of Toma, who acted as interpreter.

"Them fellows say ponies die if no find grass pretty quick. Ponies so weak now can hardly stand up."

It was true. There was no grass, or so very little, that it provided but scant nourishment for the plodding, overworked animals. The soil was not productive. Indeed, so far as the boys could determine, there was no vegetation at all in that bleak and unfriendly waste. Dick and Sandy pitied the horses but were powerless to do anything.

"Before long we'll come to a place where the grass grows," Dick stated, attempting to cheer the packers.

Toma conveyed this message to the glowering pair but without result.

"They say no think so. Many, many miles yet

before we reach 'em place where grass grows."

"The fools! The fools!" stormed Sandy, stamping his feet and glaring about him. "What do they expect us to do: shoot the horses or manufacture a lot of grass. The horses would surely starve if we turned back now. Ask them what they want us to do, Toma?"

"They say go on no good," Toma replied patiently, after he had put the question. "Fellows say we must go back or pretty soon we all die. Fellows say this bad medicine land."

"Bad medicine or not, I'm going to take it," exploded Sandy. "You tell them, Toma, that if they don't like our company or the place we're going, they're at perfect liberty to quit, like the miserable cowards they are, and return to the post."

"No! No! Don't tell them that," Dick quickly interposed. "Ask them to remain with us for a day or two longer. We'll be sure to find forage for the ponies before long."

The packers protested but finally consented to remain. The little party pushed forward. On and on it went through the glaring sunlight that fell across that indescribable waste, Lee and Pierre shaking their heads and muttering to themselves [illegible] nightfall, Dick and Toma, who were well in advance of the others, led the way down to a deep gulch, a

sort of miniature canyon, that stretched away before them as far as the eye could see.

A few miles farther on, a tiny stream of pure, cold water gurgled down from a cleft in the rocks.

"Grass here!" Toma shouted. "Plenty grass here for many horses."

Dick breathed a sigh of relief as he unslung his shoulder-pack. The horses came up at a brisk trot. Sandy, foot-sore and weary, the last person to reach the friendly oasis in that desert of rocks, grinned at sight of the green velvety strip that carpeted the entire floor of the gulch.

"They'll gorge themselves and die of colic," he predicted. "Just look at them, Dick!"

Dick laughed as he looked, then stepped back quickly, every ounce of blood gone from his face. A strange whirring sound through the air, and something had whisked past his head, striking the ground not more than ten feet behind him. One of the ponies had snorted in sudden fear, and Lee, the packer, reached out, plucking the still quivering shaft from the ground at his feet.

Toma, ever on the alert, was the first to take the queer missile from the packer's trembling grasp.

"Look!" he said, holding it up. "An arrow!"

An arrow it was—a yellow arrow with a long shaft and a sharp head. Dick and Sandy regarded

it for a moment in blank amazement. Then both of the boys jumped as a sudden, deafening report rang out.

Toma had fired his rifle. It lay now in the crook of his arm, and Toma himself, one hand shading his eyes, scanned the rugged cliffs on the opposite side of the ravine.

"Did you see something?" Dick quavered.

"Me not sure," Toma spoke calmly. "One time I thought see something move. Mebbe only sun shining on rocks. Anyway," he paused, smiling a little, "him fellow shoot arrow be frightened now at big noise an' run away, I think."

"I hope so," said Dick, endeavoring to control the tremor in his voice and trying to appear unconcerned.

Sandy's face was pale but he said nothing as he walked over to the supply packs and commenced to haul them out in preparation for supper.

On the following morning, when Dick awoke, there was no sign, no indication anywhere of their mysterious enemy of the night before. In the bright presence of a new day, it seemed scarcely possible that the thing really could have happened. The fear and dread he had experienced before retiring for the night, was gone. The bright rays of the sun were friendly and reassuring. There was something peaceful and comforting in the sight of

the green strip of grass growing there in the ravine, and in the sound of the water tumbling down from the rocks.

Lighted-heartedly, he threw back his blankets and jumped up, only to meet the troubled gaze of Toma, who sat, fully dressed, a few feet away, his rifle in his lap.

"What's the matter, Toma?" Dick cried jovially. "You look as if you'd lost your best friend."

The guide replied by pointing in the direction of the pack-horses. Dick turned his head quickly. A few feet away, two of the ponies were munching the grass, straining at their picket ropes.

"Where's the other one?" he asked.

"It go along with Lee and Pierre sometime last night," Toma answered disconsolately. "Them fellows 'fraid like coyotes. Take supplies along too—nearly half. What you think about that?"

What Dick thought was best expressed in his sudden exclamation:

"The miserable, cowardly thieves! Toma, I've a mind to go and fetch 'em back."

"No catch 'em now," pointed out the more practical Toma. "I no feel sorry very much they go. But the supplies—I no like that."

"You're right! Good riddance!" Dick walked over to the small stream of running water and com-

menced washing his face and hands. "We'll make out very well without them."

"I hate wake Sandy," said Toma. "Him get so mad mebbe no stop talking."

Dick laughed, not so very heartily, and went on with his task.

CHAPTER XII

A MYSTERIOUS TEN DOLLAR BILL

On the afternoon of the day following the disappearance of the two packers, the ravine narrowed down to a mere gully, and the three boys, leading the pack-horses, scrambled up the precipitous slope to find themselves looking out across a broad and fertile meadow.

Off in the northwest, a low-lying haze or ribbon of mist indicated the presence of a body of water.

"It's probably Thunder River," Dick surmised. "According to the map, there's no other stream of any importance we have to cross. That means, Sandy, that we must be very close to the end of our journey."

Sandy raised one hand and clapped Dick on the back as he spoke.

"I'm glad for all of us. But I must say, Dick, that this trip hasn't been so unendurable after all. On the whole, I've rather enjoyed it."

"With the exception of the arrow and the disap-

pearance of those cowardly packers, I've enjoyed it too," said Dick.

"Queer about that arrow," mused Sandy, as they started off again. "You know, Dick, I've been thinking a good deal about that ever since it happened. It's so terribly mysterious. I wonder who shot it?"

He paused for a moment as he hurried forward to keep abreast of his much swifter companion.

"Do you suppose," he resumed, "that the person who shot the arrow intended to kill one of us, or merely wanted to give us a good fright?"

"I hold to the former view," Dick answered a little grimly. "I don't think there's the least doubt on that score. The arrow missed my head by less than a foot, and nearly caught Lee in his right leg."

"A good shot all right," Sandy mumbled, half to himself. "Whoever fired it, was a marksman. He knew his business. It was an Indian, of course."

"Yes, it must have been."

Sandy raised his voice so that the guide, who was leading the pack-ponies, could hear.

"Toma, how does it happen that some of the Indians around here still use a bow and arrow. I thought that all of them went to the trading posts now to buy rifles. How do you account for it?"

"Not all buy rifles," Toma enlightened him. "Once in a while far away from trading post like this, you

find wild people, mebbe not more than once or twice see white men. These Indians very much afraid white man's guns. No come very close to settlements or trade at post. These people not many—only few tribes left."

"Yes," said Dick, "I remember hearing something like that before. Possibly, it was from Corporal Richardson."

"Well, I know this much," Sandy broke in, "I'd much rather have them to contend with than the outlaws under Henderson."

"Mebbe have both very soon," predicted Toma.

"Great Guns! I hope not!" Sandy's alarm was genuine. "I've had enough of Henderson to last me all the rest of my days. I'm really beginning to believe, though, that we've seen the last of him. At any rate, I don't think he's going to bother us any more about the mine."

"It has commenced to look that way," Dick agreed. "But I think we can account for it. Corporal Richardson and Malemute Slade are keeping them so busy, they haven't time to come up here to worry us."

"Still," Sandy reflected, "I don't believe Henderson will give up so easily. They know about the mine and will do everything possible to gain control

of it. The outlaws will be in a dangerous mood now after losing the fur."

Toma did not, as a general thing, enter into the discussions Dick and Sandy so often indulged in. But he was an attentive listener at all times, very rarely failing to understand what was being said. In the present instance so interested had he become, that he quite forgot his usual taciturnity.

"What you think, Dick," he suddenly broke forth, "if I tell you Henderson's men him close to us all the time since we left post? You believe me crazy fool, eh?"

Dick was so startled by the question that he stopped dead in his tracks and stared curiously at the young Indian.

"Why—why," he stammered, "I don't know. I don't know what to think. But you're spoofing me, Toma. It isn't reasonable, of course."

"I think," Toma was in deadly earnest, "that Henderson send men to follow us when we left post. Right now, Henderson's men in hiding close by. You see if Toma not speak you the truth."

Sandy laughed in derision.

"That's a good one! If Henderson is within fifty miles of us right now, I'll undertake to eat our two pack-horses for supper."

Toma flushed with embarrassment, but still held stubbornly to his belief. Sandy's laughter and Dick's sceptical smile had not influenced him in the least.

"You see if Toma not speak the truth," he said doggedly.

"What I want to know," Sandy taunted him, "is if a change in the weather wouldn't make you feel better. Perhaps a little rain would freshen your mind, Toma. This everlasting sunlight is getting the better of you."

"If the outlaws have really been following us," inquired Dick, scowling darkly at Sandy, "why haven't we heard from them before? Why haven't we been attacked? If what you say is true, Toma, Henderson has decided to be a good man instead of the rascal we have always known."

"Henderson him bad, but very smart fellow," said the guide. "He shoot you, me, Sandy, in one minute if he like. But he no like because if he shoot us he mebbe lose mine."

"You mean——"

"Much more easy, much better for him to follow along 'till we find mine ourselves. Then he take it away from us. More sense do thing like that than kill you, me, Sandy, when not know for sure if we have map."

Sandy's smile suddenly faded away.

"By George, you're right! Toma, I'll take back everything I just said—with some interest added."

"Then, according to your belief," said Dick, "we have nothing to fear until we have located the mine?"

"No. Only men with arrows bother us now. Me pretty sure Henderson keep out of sight. He no want us suspect anything when he get ready take mine."

"How long have you had this suspicion in your mind," quizzed Dick, "and why didn't you tell us before?"

"I think same as you an' Sandy until last night," came the startling revelation. "Them fellow, Lee an' Pierre, go off like that make me worry. First I think all same you an' Sandy. I say to me: 'Toma, them fellow run away because this bad medicine land an' because they 'fraid get killed Indian arrows.'

"But more I think like that the more not sure I get all the time. Lee an' Pierre have 'em more sense mebbe. Not so crazy fool after all. Both them packers I know for long, long time. Lee pretty good fellow, but Pierre get drunk, gamble—not so good like Lee."

"What in Sam Hill are you driving at?" interrupted Sandy impatiently. "I fail to see what they have to do with it. We were talking about Henderson—not about the packers."

"You understand pretty quick," said Toma, reaching in his pocket and bringing forth a crisp ten-dollar bill. "I find that in the grass next morning Lee an' Pierre run away."

"One of them lost it," reasoned Sandy, "but I fail to see——"

"I find the money an' pick it up," Toma went on, ignoring Sandy's remark. "Then I forget all about it, because I get me so excited they steal supplies an' run away. But bye-'n'-bye, I start think about that money. I remember Pierre he say to me one day: 'Toma,' he say, 'me, Lee like play poker some night but no got money.' He ask me lend him money so him an' Lee play poker."

"He must have lied to you," said Dick.

Toma shook his head.

"Me no think so. He no lie that time. Pierre an' Lee get money from somewhere else."

Dick jumped.

"From Henderson!" he exclaimed.

The Indian nodded in the affirmative.

"Me pretty sure Henderson man come during night, wake up Lee an' Pierre an' give money so they run away. In the dark, they drop money in grass an' no find this one."

Sandy turned mournful, accusing eyes upon Toma. Dejectedly, he kicked the turf at his feet.

"That's always the way," he lamented. "The minute I begin to feel happy and contented, something like this comes along to upset me. I believe Toma now. This business about the money has so thoroughly convinced me, Dick, that I wouldn't be surprised if Henderson himself should step out of that clump of bushes over yonder and tell us to throw up our hands."

"We'll keep guard every night now," Dick decided. "Whatever happens, we'll be ready for them."

"Perhaps we ought to camp here and wait for Uncle Walter," Sandy suggested. "I don't mind confessing to both of you that I'm scared stiff. Between the Indians and their arrows and Henderson and his guns, I predict that we're going to have a hot time of it."

"I think we be all right 'till we get to mine," said Toma. "No use stop here."

"What do you propose, Dick?"

"I don't know what to say," Dick confessed. "Three or four weeks is a long time to wait for reinforcements. Even then we'll probably be outnumbered. It's rather difficult to decide. Perhaps you'd like to give up altogether, Sandy, and return to the post."

Sandy's face flamed a bright crimson.

"Are you trying to insult me—or what!" he demanded hotly.

"Of course not. I mean it. It's no crime to run away if the job is too big for us. I'm not doubting your courage."

"I'll die and rot in my tracks before I go back to the post. If that's what you're figuring on doing, go ahead."

For a full minute the two boys stood, face to face, breathing heavily. There was a gleam of defiance in Sandy's eyes, while Dick's face had become overshadowed with anger. Toma dropped the end of the lead-rope carefully on the ground and placed one foot on it. Then he straightened up, putting a hand on the shoulder of each one of the young belligerents.

"No fight here," he grinned. "Dick, Sandy, you come with me. Toma show you nice place where fight all time, day an' night. Mebbe you like that better."

Dick and Sandy glared at each other for a moment, then grinned sheepishly. The matter was settled. They would go on to the mine.

CHAPTER XIII

THE RAIDING PARTY

THUNDER RIVER at last! Like most northern streams it had cut its channel deeply into the earth, through soil, rock and sandstone, and the result now, after ages of this corrosive action, was a deep canyon at the bottom of which roared and tumbled the mighty river.

Spring floods, caused by melting snow and ice in the hills and mountains to the west, had made a veritable torrent of the river, and Dick, Toma and Sandy, looking down at the racing, foam-capped waters, were a little dubious about crossing it.

"We'll never get the horses over at any rate," Dick decided. "There's no animal living that can swim against that current. It simply can't be done."

"No," agreed Sandy, "it can't. And I very much doubt whether we can get across ourselves. It looks to me as if the strongest raft in the world would be dashed to pieces against those rocks in a very few minutes. What do you think, Toma?"

For once, apparently, their guide was at a complete loss to know what to say. He frowned as he looked down below.

"I never see river so bad like that before," he admitted, shaking his head.

"If Toma thinks it's bad, it must be pretty bad indeed," laughed Dick. "How are we going to cross it, I wonder?"

"We no cross here," said Toma, "but mebbe we find better place somewhere else."

Acting upon this suggestion, they started out. They followed the river for several miles, making their way along the comparatively level ground that skirted the edge of the canyon. At the end of an hour, they paused in dismay.

"It seems to be getting worse instead of better," complained Sandy. "It's hopeless. I don't believe we're going to get over."

"We've got to do it somehow," Dick gritted his teeth. "Let's make camp here, stake out the ponies and go after this thing systematically. Sandy and I will return to the place we just came from and scout further up the river, while you, Toma, go on in the other direction. We'll meet back here sometime before evening."

"All right," said Toma, "I think that good idea.

We pretty sure find some place not quite so bad. Then we build raft."

"But what about the ponies?" Sandy wanted to know.

"They'll be safe enough here."

"I don't mean that, Dick. What are we going to do when we build the raft? We can't take pack-horses along with us."

"We can take the packs along," reasoned Dick, "and that's almost as important. We'll turn the ponies loose and let them shift for themselves."

"But we can't carry all our supplies with us when we do get over. It's impossible. We can't do it."

"No," admitted Dick, very much perplexed. "We can't."

"We make 'em cache for supplies," Toma suggested. "We carry 'em over to mine, little at a time."

"That's the only solution, I suppose," said Sandy, "but it's sure to be a whale of a job. How'll you like to climb up those slippery rocks with a hundred pounds on your back? Another thing, how far do you think it is from the other side of the river to the mine?"

Dick produced the map, while Sandy and Toma gathered around him.

"It doesn't say how far it is," Dick stated, as he unfolded the now soiled piece of paper. "But it isn't so very far because the cross, indicating its position, is very close to the river."

"That doesn't mean anything," Sandy turned away in disgust. "How do we know at what point along the river the mine is? We may be fifteen or twenty miles out of our course, for all you know. The place where we cross may be miles and miles away from the mine."

Dick placed an agitated finger on the map and bit his lips in vexation. Sandy was right. How could they possibly find the mine unless they knew at least approximately at what point along the river it was situated? And then, suddenly, staring at the paper in his hand, he became aware of something he had not noticed before. Across the upper portion of the map, Thunder River was indicated by a line, a fairly straight line throughout its entire length. A casual or fleeting look at the line brought out nothing of importance, but a close and careful examination showed that, midway between the source and mouth of the river, there was a tiny loop or bow. Within this bow, on the opposite or upper side of the line, was the "X," which showed the location of the mine.

"I've got it!" Dick shouted. "There's an abrupt

curve in the river at only one place—opposite the mine. When we find that curve, we'll know where to cross."

Sandy took the map from his friend and inspected it closely, silently.

"Yes, the curve is there," he was forced to admit. "And it ought to simplify matters, too. The next thing on our program is to find it."

"Why not do as I just proposed," said Dick. "While we're hunting for a place to cross, we may find the bow."

It seemed about the only thing to do under the circumstances. In a short time the boys had staked out the ponies, and had picked up their rifles in preparation for departure. Toma, who had been looking about, suddenly exclaimed:

"I have good idea. I climb big, tall tree over there an' mebbe I find out where river makes turn. I go up see."

He crossed over to the tree at a brisk trot and commenced climbing up. It was a huge, towering spruce, and it was several minutes before he reached the top.

"Do you see anything?" shouted Sandy.

Toma clung to the topmost branches, swaying there nearly seventy-five feet above their heads, a dark blur against a background of blue sky. He

made no answer to Sandy's shouted inquiry, in fact refusing to divulge any information until he had clambered down again and stood there on the knoll beside them.

"I find 'em curve all right," he announced gleefully, brushing away the fragments of bark which clung to his clothing. "You laugh when I tell you only two miles down river. I see very plain from top of tree. River come out on this side nearly quarter-mile before it turn go back again."

Sandy clapped his hands joyfully.

"What luck! Toma, you old rascal."

"I find out something else too," continued the guide, pleased at the impression he was making. "In place where river turns, I see another big ravine where river flow long time ago. Mebbe it just about place where you find 'em mine."

Waiting to hear no more, Sandy, overcome with a fever of excitement, rushed over to the packhorses again.

"Let's hurry," he called, beginning to gather up their supplies.

"Come on, Dick, get a move on! Toma, you'll have to pack these brutes yourself. I never could throw a diamond hitch. Gee, but I'm excited."

Dick had never seen Sandy quite like this before.

His chum's face was flushed; his eyes glowed brightly.

"We'll get to the mine tonight," he exulted. "Throw on these packs, Toma. If we can't cross the river any other way, I'm going to swim."

The contagion had caught Dick, too. His own hands were trembling as he stooped down to untie the picket-rope from the stake he had driven down only a few minutes before.

"This is great!" he mumbled to himself. "We're almost there. I can hardly believe——"

The pony, only a few feet away, reared suddenly on its hind legs, screaming in pain. The stake snapped under Dick's hands and the rope swished away in the grass as the stricken little beast leaped forward a few feet, then fell headlong.

Completely taken aback, Dick raised his head. Sandy and Toma had flattened themselves out on the ground and were reaching for their rifles. A series of sounds very much like small rocks thudding around them, was followed soon after by a deep, resounding crash from the direction of Toma and Sandy. A few more reports from Toma's gun, and the deep, brooding hush of the wilderness became suddenly intensified—a silence that seemed to wall them about, to encompass them.

Three startled, white-faced youths crawled on hands and knees to the protection of a large rock and squatted down in mute terror. By some wonderful miracle, each had escaped injury. A score or more of yellow-plumed shafts; the arrows of the invading party, projected here and there above the green grass, like so many tiny sentinels of death.

"A close call," breathed Dick, "and may God help us if they come back."

"They were all in hiding over there on that ridge," Sandy volunteered the information, pointing out the place with a finger that still shook. "I didn't see one of them—not one! Did you, Toma?"

"No."

"Cracky! but how those arrows came," Sandy shivered. "Well, our pony's gone."

"We go too," said Toma, "unless we be more careful. Crazy, them fellows! What harm we do them?"

"No harm," answered Dick, "unless they feel we've no business here on their hunting ground. We *are* trespassing, when it comes right down to it."

"This bad medicine land," Toma asserted. "That's why free traders no come here. Once in a while mebbe come but never go back."

"Be quiet!" Sandy expostulated. "I'm feeling creepy enough now. Those Indians steal up on us

and disappear again like ghosts. It takes the nerve right out of me."

"Me too," said Dick, "but hereafter I, for one, intend to be ready for them. At least, I don't purpose to be asleep when they come over for their next raid. And I'm going to keep my eyes open as I never kept them open before."

"Well, we weren't exactly asleep," objected Sandy.

"We might just as well have been. I'll bet that any one of their party could have walked over here and taken a scalp before we would have noticed him."

Toma rose warily and went over to the packs.

"I think no more danger now," he called. "We better hurry before dark comes. Lots of work build raft over at river."

"We'll have to make two trips down there," Dick suddenly remembered. "We've only one pony now."

CHAPTER XIV

A FATEFUL CROSSING

THE remainder of the afternoon was passed in getting their supplies to the river. This task was accomplished with the greatest care possible. Sandy led the pack-horse, while Dick and Toma went forward, rifles in hand, ever on the alert. In dead silence, they scanned the woods to the right and left for a possible sign of their recent enemy.

One piece of good fortune came with the discovery of a safe crossing place in the river. Toma had found it after a half hour of reconnoitring, while Dick and Sandy awaited his return on the steep slope, near the top of the canyon.

"Mebbe we swim pony across in the morning," he confided, smiling for the first time in several hours. "River wide an' very few rapids. Find 'em plenty easy for raft."

With Dick standing guard, the raft was built that same night, and, on the following morning, supplies and equipment aboard, they were ready for the crossing.

"The thing to do first," said Sandy, scratching his head, "is to get our little playmate, Sir Bucking Broncho, into the water. How do we go about it, Toma?"

Toma led the pony down to the water's edge and coaxed and cajoled the little beast but to no avail. The horse sniffed, snorted, swung around this way and that, but refused stubbornly to do more than wet his front fetlocks at the brink of the running stream. He was a good pony, but he was taking no chances.

Dick laughed in spite of himself, although the delay was irksome.

"I don't know as I blame him very much. The water does look cold and it's a long way across. Perhaps, we'll have to leave him on this side after all. Do you suppose the three of us could push him in?"

The pack-horse not only refused to be pushed, but resented the liberty taken. A glancing blow sent Sandy reeling back and deposited him, none too gently, in the exact center of a willow copse, where he sat for a moment with a surprised look on his face. The look of surprise changed to one of anger as there came to his ears the loud guffaws of Dick and Toma.

"Laugh if you want to," said the aggrieved

young man, rising and brushing his clothing. "It may interest you to know that I'm through. You fellows can do your pushing alone."

The merriment subsided presently and Dick turned to Toma.

"I guess we'll have to give up," he decided, wiping the tears of laughter from his eyes. "Your friend has plainly indicated his intention of remaining on this side. Perhaps he doesn't like your company, Sandy."

"And perhaps he does," Sandy retorted promptly. "I'm blaming you, not the pony. Any idiot ought to know that that's no way to treat a horse."

"If you like, you can coax him over with a lump of sugar," Dick grinned.

Sandy turned his back upon his tormenter.

"Go ahead and don't mind me. Why don't you put your own vast intelligence to work in some practical way? I wouldn't give up if I were you."

"I try once more," Toma suddenly announced. "I think this time I make pony swim across. You, Dick, Sandy, stand on raft ready push off jes' so soon as I get in water."

"Get in water!" cried Dick in alarm. "Why you're not going to swim, are you?"

"Watch!—See!"

Toma walked back, leading the horse. Thirty

feet from the shore he bolted to the pony's bare back, wheeled the animal abruptly about, and came forward at a brisk trot. Dick and Sandy jumped aboard the raft, poles in hand, ready to push off. At the river's edge the pony hesitated, but a quick pressure from Toma's heels sent him plunging into the water. A second later steed and rider struck out boldly for the opposite shore.

As the raft came abreast of the two swimmers, Toma released his hold of the pony's mane and, lead-rope in hand, scrambled aboard.

"Like clock work," exulted Sandy, slapping Toma's dripping shoulders. "You're a wonder, Toma, and there's no mistake about that. Even Dick would never have dared to pull a stunt like that."

"You're right," Dick returned good-naturedly, "I never would."

The crossing was made without mishap. As the craft glided up to the rocky shore, Dick and Sandy cheered lustily.

"Before we do anything more," said Dick a few minutes later, when they had unloaded the raft, "I think we had better decide upon some definite course of action. Unless this map and everything connected with it is a hoax, we are now within a few miles of the mine."

"Yes," said Sandy.

"Well," Dick continued, "we are all very anxious to find it. From now on our search must be painstaking and we musn't waste any more time than is absolutely necessary."

"Of course," Sandy agreed, "but where are we going to look first?"

"That's a question we'd better decide right away. The place where we're standing now," Dick made a sweeping gesture with his arm, "seems to form one end of a more or less oval space, which lies between the river on one side and the dry canyon or ravine on the other.

"The mine," he went on slowly, "may be located in any one of a number of likely places. It may be in the oval, stretching away behind us, or in the ravine, or somewhere on the other side of the ravine. In which of these places are we going to search first?"

"The ravine," said Sandy. "I believe we'll be more apt to find the mine there."

"I think ravine too," Toma agreed with him. "What you say we make camp here while we look for mine? No use take supplies an' pony along everywhere we go."

"That's a good suggestion. This will be our base, which we can always come back to. Anyway, it

won't take more than an hour or two to travel through the ravine from one end to the other. If the mine's there, we'll be sure to find it in a very short time."

"There's one thing I don't like about this arrangement," Sandy pointed out. "If we make our base here—which seems a pretty good idea—aren't we running the chance of losing everything? In our absence the Indians could easily slip down here and steal it all. Put us in a nice pickle, wouldn't it?"

"It would!" Dick declared most emphatically. "One of use will have to remain here, that's all."

"Which one of us?"

The three boys looked at each other. It was quite apparent from the expression on the face of each, that none of them wished to remain behind. To go and look for the gold mine was much more interesting and exciting.

"I guess we'll have to draw straws," Dick grinned.

"That's fair enough," Sandy broke off a twig as he spoke.

He divided the twig in three small pieces—one shorter than the rest. He turned his back as he arranged them in his hand.

The unpleasant choice of remaining to guard the camp fell to Dick. For a moment his face clouded with disappointment as he gazed at the tell-tale straw.

"O well," he comforted himself, "I'll have my chance later on."

Sandy and Toma rose joyfully to their feet, slung on their shoulder-packs and otherwise prepared for an immediate departure.

"We'll be back before lunch time," Sandy sang out, as the two made their way across the comparatively level piece of ground, and headed for the ravine.

"Good luck!" shouted Dick.

A few moments later they had disappeared.

"I hope they find it," Dick mused, turning away. "Sandy will be overjoyed."

He walked back to the packs, his thoughts in a whirl of excitement. A few feet away the packhorse grazed contentedly. The camp, since the departure of his two friends, had become strangely quiet. There was only the sound of the river to break the heavy, all-pervading silence.

Digging down in one of the packs, Dick brought forth presently a hook and line and afterward, cutting a pole from a clump of bushes and procuring a small piece of moose meat for bait, he turned his attention to the river.

Dick loved to fish and on this particular morning luck was with him. The water swarmed with trout.

In less than twenty minutes he had pulled out a good two-days' supply of them.

"It doesn't require a great amount of skill to do this," he informed himself, throwing out his line for the last time. "If I had a hay fork, I believe I could pitch 'em out by the ton. Great Caesar! What's that!"

A quick splashing in the water on the opposite shore had drawn his attention, caused him to straighten up in sudden alarm.

"A moose!" he ejaculated, breathing his relief. "I thought maybe it was something else."

He stood perfectly still as the majestic swimmer came on.

"I can't shoot him—I can't!" decided Dick, his admiring gaze on the monarch of the northland forests, watching with bated breath as the splendid beast continued its course across the murky, discolored stream. "Anyway," he continued, "it wouldn't be fair to take an advantage like that. Our larder is full of meat now."

He actually turned his back a moment later as he rolled up his line, picked up the fish he had caught and walked back to the packs. Yet he swung about again when the moose plunged to shore, scarcely more than a hundred feet away. Head raised high, the

magnificent animal struck out at a brisk trot and was soon lost to view.

"I'm glad I didn't take a shot at him," Dick breathed thankfully. "He was too wonderful."

The morning wore on. It was eleven o'clock when Dick consulted his watch, and only a few minutes after when Toma and Sandy appeared. Haggard-eyed, faces gray with dust, they loped into camp and threw themselves down, gasping for breath.

"We've got to get out of here quick!" Sandy wheezed, turning a terror-stricken gaze upon his chum. "I'm fagged out . . . Crawled a hundred yards on our bellies before we dared to get up and run . . . We haven't a moment to lose."

"Why, Sandy, what do you mean?"

"They're coming now!"

Sandy staggered to his feet; Toma raced to get the pony. It was not until the packs had been lifted and tied into place, that Dick was made aware of the danger which threatened them.

"Indian encampment over there in the ravine. Ran right into it. Dick, I'm afraid they saw us."

Dick's pulses quickened perceptibly as he received the disconcerting news.

"We'll cross the river. Better there. Don't bother with the pack-horse."

"No, Toma thinks we'll be safer among those high rocks behind us."

As Dick paused for a brief space undecided, Toma seized the lead rope, motioning frantically.

"I see 'em first fellow already. Look out!"

He raced forward, pressed the lead-rope in Dick's hands, then fell back to cover their retreat. His rifle roared intermittently as they made their way up the slope.

"Our chance is slim, but we may make it," Sandy breathed in his chum's ear. "You see, Dick, there's the danger of being cut off. We may walk straight into a trap."

"You think they may climb up from their side of the ravine and head us off."

"Yes," shuddered Sandy. "It will be sure to happen if we don't hurry."

"Encumbered as we are with this pony, I don't see how we can hurry. The farther we go, the harder it's going to be. We'll never reach that high point of rocks up there at this rate."

"Let's wait here until Toma catches up with us. I think myself we're risking our lives needlessly by taking the pony along. He's too much of a hindrance."

Toma came up and the situation was explained to him.

"All right, we unload pony," he said tersely, suiting the action to the word. "Sandy, you, Dick stand by ready with guns."

The task took but a moment. They were off again at a dead run, while the pack-horse stood gazing reproachfully after them.

CHAPTER XV

WITHIN THE BARRICADE

Toma poked out his head from behind a gray pile of rocks and looked down. Far below him, at the bottom of the ravine, he beheld a sight which caused his hands to clinch involuntarily and his heart to quicken a beat or two in righteous indignation.

In the Indian encampment, there was a very noticeable flurry and bustle of excitement as a small party, headed by an exceedingly atrocious individual, made its way into camp. With the exception of the leader, Toma had never seen any of them before. Also, with the exception of the leader, every man was weighted down with a load of what—even at that distance—Toma recognized immediately as being the supplies he, Dick and Sandy had discarded at the beginning of their hasty retreat.

Even the pony, which brought up the procession, was the self same pack-horse he had ridden into the river that morning. Their supplies and their horse

were gone, but it was not this loss alone which had been the direct cause of Toma's anger.

The young guide flashed one more look of resentment in the direction of the encampment, then turned quickly and made his way back to Dick and Sandy, who were crouched within a natural rock barricade, about one hundred yards distant.

"What did you find out?" Sandy demanded as Toma rejoined them.

"Indians get our supply an' pony," came the prompt answer.

"Well, that was to be expected," said Dick. "It can't be helped now. Did you find out anything else?"

"Yes."

"What was it?"

"Toma see scar-face Indian."

"What!" exclaimed Dick and Sandy in one voice.

"Scar-face Indian him there all right. Make himself big fellow. What you think about that?"

"It's an outrage!" stormed Dick. "No wonder we're having trouble. So Henderson is at the bottom of this after all."

"If scar-face Indian here, Henderson not very far away," speculated Toma.

"Old Scar-Face must have discovered the mine before this if it's located in the ravine," Sandy suddenly spoke up.

"It doesn't matter much now where the mine is," Dick stated despondently. "We can't do anything anyway. Our cause is pretty nearly hopeless."

"Uncle Walter is coming," Sandy reminded him. "Don't forget that."

"Two or three weeks from now. We may all be dead before then."

"We can defend ourselves here for a day or two," said Sandy. "In the meantime maybe something will turn up."

"What about food and water?"

"Dick!" exclaimed Sandy, moving over and placing one arm affectionately about his chum, "You're not your usual self. It's not like you to give up so easily."

Dick received the gentle rebuke with calm indifference. He stared soberly out across the desolate, sun-filled space without speaking.

"Indians make night attack mebbe," Toma suddenly broke the silence.

"Let 'em come," growled Dick. "We'll be ready. All I hope is that Scar-Face leads the attacking party and that I can get a shot at him."

"They'll probably be in no hurry about that attack," Sandy sagely remarked. "They know we're up here somewhere and practically helpless. It would be a whole lot simpler and easier to starve us out."

"That sounds reasonable," said Dick. "We're trapped and they know it."

"I tell you something," Toma rose and began pacing back and forth across the narrow, confining space within the barricade. "We have good chance now to make 'em Indians all look foolish. Place over there"—pointing—"where look down camp. You, me, Sandy go over there an' start shoot rifles. Kill 'em plenty men in very few minutes. We drive 'em all bad fellows out of ravine."

Dick and Sandy stared at each other aghast.

"What you say?" inquired Toma.

"Never!" shuddered Dick.

"Murder!" shivered Sandy.

"Why not?" the tone was plaintive. "Toma not understand."

"You poor devil," Sandy commenced grimly, but checked himself. "What quarrel have we with those people down there, Toma? It's not their fault—it's Henderson's and the scar-face Indian's."

"All right, I go shoot him—that fellow."

Dick's sudden laugh relieved the tension.

"We didn't come out here to kill anyone," Sandy attempted to explain. "We came out here to find the mine. It's wrong to take any human life."

Toma shrugged his shoulders.

"You mean you sit here an' no shoot if attack

come?" he asked in amazement. "You sit here an' let bad fellow kill you without so much raise up your rifle?"

"If I'm cornered, I'll fight, of course. But not until then."

The guide shook his head and subsided into a puzzled silence.

"What we do then?" he asked presently.

"What I'd like to do," Dick cut in sharply, "is to run away—get out of this mess somehow."

"How we swim river?" Toma wanted to know. "No chance build raft."

"What about our own raft?" Sandy wondered. "Do you suppose they've overlooked that?"

"I'll give them more credit for brains than that," was Dick's opinion. "I don't think we ought to consider it."

He paused for a moment, his brow wrinkling in thought.

"The only other way of escape is across the ravine, and I'm willing to bet they have sentries posted every hundred yards."

"Very probably," Sandy agreed, "but even at that there's a possibility that we could make it. After dark there might be a chance. It's better than staying here."

"In our present hopeless position," said Dick calmly, "I'll try anything."

"What about you, Toma?"

The young Indian drew himself up proudly.

"I go too," he stated simply.

"Well, then, it's decided." Sandy arose and gazed out across the rough, broken strip of land to the south, conscious of a sinking feeling within.

To attempt to escape by way of the ravine was, as he well knew, a desperate hazard. Their chance of getting through safely was slim indeed—with every advantage in favor of their ruthless enemy.

"It's the only thing we can do," he declared, turning again toward his two companions and speaking in a low, trembling voice.

Dick evaded Sandy's direct gaze and he, too, looked out upon that weird, desolate view. The afternoon sun was very bright and the rocks, gray and white and brown, were like blinding mirrors to his eyes. Somewhere, deep down within his breast, he could feel the beginning of a sob—a choking, helpless feeling difficult to express.

"My throat's dry," said Sandy, "and I'd like to have a drink."

"I go for water," volunteered Toma.

Dick wheeled about quickly.

"No! No! Don't be a fool, Toma. We'll

have to stand it. You can't risk your life now."

In dull, aching monotony, the afternoon passed. The sun slipped down through a bank of clouds to a flaming northwestern sky. Innumerable shadows, spreading grotesquely about them, grew dark, then velvet-black, merging finally into one complete inky blot.

"There aren't a hundred stars out tonight," Dick whispered to his two delighted companions. "Conditions couldn't be better."

"It has clouded over," said Sandy. "Thank God for that."

Out of the west had come a cool, moist breeze. If it rained, so much the better. Since their departure from Fort Good Faith, three weeks previous, the days and nights had succeeded each other with no hint of rain, a seemingly endless procession of sunlit and starlit hours.

"We ought to start pretty soon," said Dick, as he paced uneasily, restlessly about.

"I'm ready any time you fellows are," Sandy replied.

Ten minutes passed. The wind seemed stronger now and was blowing more from the south. Unable longer to endure the suspense, Toma plucked at Dick's arm.

"Come," he whispered.

Slowly, cautiously, three figures worked their way up and over the rough barricade of rocks and headed for the ravine.

"Keep close together," cautioned Dick in a low voice. "Whatever happens, we mustn't become separated."

In a few minutes they had reached the edge of the ravine and prepared for the perilous descent. They had to feel their way now. Every step forward was tedious, conscious effort. The moisture-laden wind, breathing over the warm rocks, had produced a wet, slippery surface under foot. Careful as the three boys were, one of them slipped or fell occasionally, producing a sound which caused them to pause in consternation in the belief that the noise must have carried to the sentries below.

About half way down, a most disconcerting thing occurred. In attempting to recover his balance, Sandy dropped his rifle. It slid out of reach as he made a wild lunge for it, and a moment latter dropped twenty feet to the ledge below. The loud metallic clatter resulting, broke across the silence—so it seeemed to Sandy—with a force and noise as terrifying as that made by a derailed express train dropping over a cliff.

The three boys stood huddled together in speechless dismay. Had they been heard? Would the

sentries know now for a certainty that an effort was being made to escape?

Sandy recovered his rifle and, following a whispered consultation, it was decided to make their way along the slope of the ravine before descending further. They had succeeded in covering a distance of perhaps three hundred yards, when they paused again—this time in absolute terror.

Up along the ridge, not far from their previous barricade, there arose a medley of demoniacal shrieks and yells that would easily have struck fear in the bravest heart. So suddenly and unexpectedly had it come, that the three boys, white-faced and trembling, shrank back against the side of the ledge too frightened even to move.

CHAPTER XVI

A PATH THROUGH THE ROCKS

FOLLOWING the first shock of surprise and terror, Dick reached out and clutched Sandy's arm.

"Now is the time to cross the ravine," he whispered tersely. "Our best chance. Come!"

The remainder of the descent to the floor of the ravine was made at the cost of bruised bodies and torn garments, but with a speed and dispatch that made caution utterly impossible. Dick's shins and knuckles were bleeding as he helped Sandy to his feet and spoke again in a low voice.

"Are you there, Toma?"

"Yes."

"All right, we'll make a bee-line for it. Ready!"

Three shadowy forms moved out to the level floor of the ravine, hesitated a split-second, then bolted for the opposite side.

Crash!

The report thundered in Dick's ears. His own gun flamed into the night with a loud, reverberating roar. Four or five wavering figures, who had at-

tempted to check their flight, fell back suddenly, making a path for them. First Sandy, then Dick, then Toma—each in turn fired his rifle into the air as he sprinted for the safety of the rocks.

They were clambering up presently, side by side, in the first flurry of a drenching Spring rain. The wind whipped about them, tearing fitfully at their soiled and rent clothing. Somewhere, miles up the river valley, a crooked flare of light lit up the sky.

It was a smothering downpour long before they had reached the top. It seemed now as if the earth was slipping under their feet. Water and gravel! Curious little patches of sliding wet clay! In places, thick mud, ankle deep, oozing out of crevices in the rocks! Yet they went on somehow through a breath-taking torture of exhaustion, contriving finally to pull themselves up over the edge of the canyon wall to the firm, grass-grown space beyond.

They had struggled to safety and were, for the present, at least, beyond the fear of immediate pursuit. Something very much like a prayer breathed from Dick's lips. Sandy had thrown himself to the ground, his body shaking with sobs. With the exception of Toma, who, even in this extremity, possessed the untamed, unbeaten spirit of the wild, the little party had spent its last ounce of endurance and its last spark of courage.

Yet, they had made good their escape. They had come through the Indian lines, less than a quarter of a mile from the main encampment. It was an achievement worth while. Dick, recovering his breath, sat perfectly still, thrilled and happy as he looked out into the storm.

He was recalled from his abstraction by Toma's voice, almost at his ear.

"We go pretty soon an' find dry place to sleep. What you think?"

"Yes," he answered, "but let Sandy rest for a while. This warm rain won't hurt us."

The youngest member of the trio rolled over, propping himself up on one elbow.

"I'm all right now. I'm ready to go on. I'm so happy I can't think. If there was ever a time to feel glad for the sparing of three no-account lives, it's tonight."

Not long afterward, they crawled into a dense thicket which, though far from dry, afforded some protection from the steadily falling rain.

"Wake me up early," Sandy muttered sleepily, as he snuggled down like a young lynx and closed his eyes.

Dick had started to follow his example, when he noticed that Toma still sat like the graven statue of a Hindu god.

"Aren't you going to lie down?" he asked.

"No," came the rather startling answer, "Toma no sleepy tonight."

Dick stared his unbelief.

"How can that be?" he asked incredulously. "Toma, if it wasn't so blamed dark, I could look into your face and convince myself you're lying."

"No dare go sleep tonight."

"Why?"

"Forget to wake up. First thing we know Indian come. Just so soon get light, Scar-Face send out party look everywhere. He try find us. We too close encampment yet."

"Why, you deceiving old rascal——" Dick choked, deeply impressed by the other's unselfishness. "Do you mean to tell me you'd sit here all night and keep watch alone?"

"Yes," answered Toma, "I sit here so I wake you and Sandy before it get light. Then we travel fast. When Indian start look for us we be many miles away."

"So you intend to sacrifice your own comfort for us?"

"Toma no understand."

Dick crawled over and put his arms about the statuesque figure.

"Lie down, you miserable deceiver," he purred.

"Lie down before I pull out my hunting knife and scalp you. No wonder we hate you—Sandy and I."

"Stinging rattlesnakes!" gasped a sleepy voice. "Have you gone suddenly mad, Dick? What was that you just said to Toma?"

Dick laughed.

"Listen, Sandy, do you know what this lump of uselessness purposes to do?"

"No."

"Stay up all night so he'll be sure to wake us before dawn."

"But what's the big idea?"

"He doesn't think we're safe here, so close to the Indian encampment. He thinks Scar-Face'll send out a scouting party at daybreak."

"I never thought of that. Of course, he will," Sandy had become genuinely alarmed.

"So Toma is going to watch while we two lazy-bones sleep," Dick concluded.

"Like fun he is."

"I've come to the conclusion," Dick commented dryly, "that Toma is taking too much responsibility upon himself. He's not satisfied with doing most of the work; he must do most of the thinking too."

"It's a terrible state of affairs," Sandy growled. "What will we do with him?"

"As duly appointed judge sitting on this case, I

propose to make an example of you, John Toma. Prisoner before the bar, with malice aforethought, I do hereby sentence you to four hours of solitary slumber."

"Without benefit of clergy," supplemented Sandy.

"Without benefit of clergy and with his boots on."

"Moccasins, your honor," corrected the prosecuting attorney.

"All right," Dick laughed, "without clergy and with moccasins tightly strapped about his ankles. Take him to his cell, sheriff."

"I no understand what you try say me," said the prisoner, a little bewildered.

"You're to sleep four hours without stopping while Dick and I keep watch," Sandy explained.

It was exactly three o'clock by Dick's watch when the three boys emerged from the thicket to continue their interrupted flight. The rain had ceased falling and a few stars peeped out from between dark clouds, scudding before the wind.

"We'll make a nice wet trail through the wet grass," Sandy grumbled sleepily. "Almost anybody could follow us."

"It may be more difficult than you think," Dick was of the opinion. "The sun will be up in an hour, and it won't take long to dry things off."

Their course away from the river—almost due

west—led them across a rolling plain in the direction of a high range of hills, beyond which were the mountains. With the coming of daylight, they discerned the gray outline of the nearest hill, not more than two miles away.

The hill was steep and wide, more like a lofty plateau than a hill. Trees and vegetation covered its lower portion, but towards its summit the earth and rocks were perfectly bare.

"We're going to have a good, stiff climb," Dick remarked. "Do you feel equal to it, Sandy?"

The person addressed shifted his pack over chafed and burning shoulders.

"If I had something to eat, I could make it better."

"No eat 'till we get to top," said Toma. "We hide better up there. Indians see where we are if stop here."

It took an hour of exhausting effort to make the ascent. Very much out of breath, limbs shaking with weariness, they stumbled forward a few paces, then threw off their shoulder-packs and proceeded to bring forth the meagre store of food that remained to them. Dick divided a bannock and a small chunk of bacon.

"We'll have to eat the bacon raw," he declared, a

slight quaver in his voice. "There's no firewood here."

"Or water either that I can see," added Sandy. "It's a good thing we filled our water bottles on the way over."

Towards the close of the inadequate, barely satisfying meal, Dick, who had been gazing curiously about him, pointed to an opening in the rocks a few yards away.

"It looks as if a sort of path runs through there," he remarked.

"Deer-run," suggested Sandy.

"What would deer be doing up here?" Dick wanted to know.

"Mebbe salt-lick somewhere," Toma bore out Sandy's conjecture.

Investigation proved that there was a path, clearly defined and well-beaten, a path which wound away towards the center of the plateau. Following it for a while, the three weary explorers passed through a narrow, broken defile and emerged at length to an opening amongst the rocks. They paused in wonder.

Immediately ahead sparkling like a jewel under the bright rays of the morning sun, was a pool or small lake. A perpendicular wall of sandstone rose sheer on one side, but on the other, a little to the

right of where the boys were standing, the shoreline was practically unbroken and level, sloping slightly upward over a grass-and tree-grown space to another wall of sandstone. The whole effect was that of a huge hole or depression sunk into the earth: The small lake occupied one-half of this depression and the green slope the remaining half.

The boys stood for several minutes, struck with the beauty and novelty of the scene.

"I don't care whether that pond's a thousand feet deep and cold as a cake of ice," Sandy suddenly decided. "I'm going to have a swim in it. A cool plunge right now would make me feel like a million dollars."

He laughed as he spoke, but a surprised grunt from Toma quickly drew his attention to another quarter. As the guide pointed out the cause of his startled ejaculation, both Dick and Sandy gasped in wonder.

Twenty feet to their right, a heavy wooded cross reared its awesome shape above a mound of earth and rocks.

"A grave!" whispered Sandy.

"I'm not sure it is a grave," said Dick a moment later, as they approached to examine the cross.

"Why not?" asked Sandy.

"Because," Dick looked about carefully, "there's

no indication of one. The mound and pile of rocks support the cross."

"If that's the case," argued Sandy, "what was it put here for? People don't build crosses just for the fun they get out of it."

"I realize that. But where's the grave?"

"It's here somewhere. I feel sure of it."

"There's no name carved on the cross," Dick pointed out. "And it isn't a regular cross either. Look here," he indicated one of the arms. "The end of this is pointed; the other isn't. It looks like a marker or sign of some sort."

Sandy stood perfectly still, head on one side, and examined the cross speculatively.

"Do you suppose——" he began.

Dick jumped.

"A marker for the mine! Good heavens! I never thought of that!"

"It might be," said Sandy in an awed, breathless tone.

"Yes, it might."

"It points over there at that perpendicular wall on the other side of the lake."

"The mine couldn't be under water," protested Dick.

"No, of course not. But it could easily be off somewhere in that general direction."

"Over on the other side of the cliff, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Tell you what," Dick had become heir to a strange excitement, "let's continue following the path up out of this hole and see what we can see. We'll skirt around to the back of the lake."

"It certainly wouldn't do any harm."

The path led away across the slope, swerved sharply to the left and came to an abrupt stop at the foot of a wall of solid sandstone, more than forty feet in height. Cut into the sandstone, to the boys' utter amazement, was a rough flight of steps.

"May wonders never cease!" gasped Sandy. "Who do you suppose did this?"

"A path leading down to the water," cried Dick. "Sandy, we're closer now. I'm convinced of it."

"Dick, I'm shaking like a leaf."

They went up the steps slowly, Sandy in the lead. Reaching the top, they paused again, looking carefully about them.

With a wildly beating heart, Dick noticed that the path still threaded its way through a veritable graveyard of broken rocks and tomb-shaped ridges of sandstone.

CHAPTER XVII

SANDY EXPLORES THE MINE

SANDY'S whoop of joy was the first intimation Dick had of the actual discovery of the mine. Unable to suppress his excitement and eagerness, the young Scotchman had loped down the path well in advance of his two friends, and had reached the coveted goal at least five minutes before Toma and Dick put in their belated appearance.

Sandy was gibbering inanely as Dick stepped up and clapped him on the back. They shook hands all around, and then even Toma so far forgot his dignity and reserve as to join in an impromptu dance that would have shamed a drink-crazed party of South Sea Islanders. Presently Dick held up one hand.

"Enough of this, Sandy. Let's cool off. We're actually here at last. But we musn't take leave of our senses altogether, or play the part of fools. I propose that we make a careful inspection of the mine."

The mine proper consisted of a single shallow shaft cut down into the rock and shale to a depth of about eight feet. Over the top of the shaft stood a windlass, a huge cumbersome affair made out of spruce logs.

"Our mine is more than half full of water," laughed Dick, looking down into the shaft. "It'll take us a day or more to bail the thing out."

Following a cursory look around, Dick led the way to a small log cabin, which stood a short distance back from the mine. It was old and considerably out of repair. The door had been nailed shut and the windows sealed from the inside. A mud chimney, projecting through the roof, had crumbled to decay; and a good deal of the chinking between the logs of the house had dropped out, leaving gaping holes behind.

"It's very nearly useless now," Sandy observed, shaking his head, "but I have no doubt we could make it habitable."

Dick and Toma attempted to pry open the door. They had no tools at their disposal except a small hatchet, the guide always carried with him. By using the blade as a wedge and then hammering upon it with a rock, they contrived finally to force their way into the dark, musty interior.

Even with the light streaming in from the open doorway, it was at first very difficult to see very clearly to every part of the cabin. A mud fire-place, a rough bench and table comprised the furnishings of the room. Propped against the wall on one side were a few mining tools, including a small pick, a coil of rope and a shovel. A large bucket which, judging from its shape and general appearance, had been carved out of a pine log, stood in one corner.

Further examination on the part of the three boys proved unavailing. Little more of interest was found until Toma, prowling about, discovered a trap door, which had been cut through the scored logs in the floor.

The trap was ponderous and heavy, stubbornly refusing to come up. It was raised, at length, through the combined efforts of the excited trio, who peered down into the dark hole, faces alight with interest.

"Looks very much like a deep cellar," said Sandy, with a sharp intake of breath. "But what was it used for?"

Dick lit a match in an effort to see below. The tiny flame flared up for a moment, then went out. A second, third and fourth match——

"No use!" impatiently Dick threw the box to the

floor and sat down with his feet dangling through the trap. "There's a draft coming up out of here. Wish I had my old pocket light."

"Move aside," ordered Sandy. "I'm going down."

"It may be deep," objected Dick. "Let's get a pole and find out."

He had risen to go outside for the pole, when Sandy pushed quickly forward, swung out over the trap and let himself down to his full length, holding on by his hands.

"Don't let go!" warned Dick, swinging around abruptly. "You don't know what's down there. Be careful, Sandy!"

Sandy grinned up provokingly, like a young ape bent on mischief, released his grip on the floor and disappeared forthwith. A low thud, coming up from below, attested to the fact that he had reached bottom. Toma's annoyed grunt and Dick's terrified exclamation, preceded a short but oppressive silence.

Was Sandy hurt? Pale and trembling, Dick stared into the black pit beneath and attempted to call out. His breath seemed to rattle in his throat.

"Are you hurt?" he finally contrived to squeak.

No answer.

"Are you there, Sandy?"

"Heigh ho up there!" came a firm and confi-

dent voice. "Throw down that box of matches."

Toma and Dick breathed a sigh of relief. The matches were dropped down. In an incredibly short space, a small flame partially lit up the dank interior and soon after began flickering and bobbing about like a large firefly.

"What luck?" Dick called out.

Sandy, bent on exploration, was too busy to reply. Match after match flared brightly, burned down to a stub, and was swallowed up in the inky maw of the hole.

"Can you pull me out of this?" Sandy asked finally, when Dick's patience had been worn to a shred. "I figure I'm about fourteen feet down. Didn't I see a coil of rope up there?"

Sandy was pulled up through the trap a short time later, blinking as his eyes met the glare of light from the doorway. In spite of his effort to appear unconcerned, it was apparent that he was gripped in some strong emotion.

"What did you find, Sandy?"

The eyes of the young Scotchman gleamed queerly.

"There's gold down there," he exploded. "Loads of it! Sacks and sacks of gold, Dick, piled up down there in moose-hide sacks, waiting to be carried away!"

For a brief interval Dick was incapable of speech.

"Go-o-ld!" he stammered.

"Yes, gold!—thousands and thousands and thousands of dollars worth, I guess."

Dick's eyes were popping.

"So they hid it there."

"Hid nothing!" Sandy was pacing back and forth in his excitement. "The real mine's down there, I tell you. Right under our feet."

"I can't believe it."

"Go down and see for yourself," shrieked Sandy. "It's there,—it's there, I tell you! Passages lead out three ways from that main hole or shaft. I could see them."

"And those moose-hide sacks?"

"At one side of the shaft, directly under this room."

"But where did they dump the rock and gravel that came out of those passages?" Dick asked incredulously. "It didn't just disappear, did it? Tons and tons of earth and rock must have been moved in order to get the gold."

"I can't explain it," Sandy admitted, somewhat defiantly. "All I know is that it was moved somewhere. The real mine is down there."

"We'll start exploring it at once," Dick decided. "I'll make some sort of miner's lamp and we'll all go down. What do you say?"

A fever of excitement had seized upon them. Hunger and weariness, the fear of pursuit—everything was forgotten in the obsession of the moment. Sandy moved about with an accustomed lightness in his step; Dick had become over-eager and impatient. Of the three, Toma alone remained unshaken and indifferent.

"Why you so hurry go see mine?" he demanded of Dick, during a lull in their preparations. "You think mine run away, eh?"

"Why, no."

"How you feel if Indian come pretty soon an' no ready for him?"

"What's that?"

"Indian pretty sure come bye-'n'-bye."

"Well, what of it?"

"Dick," admonished the guide, "you, Sandy no think today. No think at all. Crazy like fool. What good is mine today if get killed tomorrow?"

"Look here, old Trouble-Face," Sandy sang out, "you're a joy killer. I don't think there's the least bit of danger."

"Danger all time," stubbornly persisted Toma.

Dick's eyes wandered back to the trap in the floor. He visualized the moose-hide sacks, bulging with gold. He wondered if Sandy had not been mistaken about those three passages.

"The Indians won't come today," he decided. "Don't worry, Toma. Besides——"

He paused to watch Sandy throw the coil of rope into the shaft and then walk back and tie the end, still in his hands, to a large iron hook in the wall—a hook that had, apparently, been put there for that express purpose.

He turned again to Toma.

"Come on, let's go down. It'll take only a few minutes."

To his surprise, the guide shrugged his shoulders and turned away. As Dick lowered himself through the trap, Toma strode to the doorway and stood looking out across the shimmering, sunlit vista of rocks and sandstone.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN THE TOILS OF HENDERSON

RETURNING to the main shaft, following a tour of exploration through the mine, Dick and Sandy were staggered by the discovery that during their absence some one had removed the rope and had closed the trap. Darkness enveloped them. The stream of light, which had poured through the wide opening in the floor of the cabin, had been cut off. The shock of the discovery for a moment unnerved the two young adventurers. The thing was incredible—almost past belief! Sandy raised his candle aloft and stared up through its flickering light. Dick smothered a cry, then stood mopping his perspiring face, too dumbfounded for words.

After the first shock of surprise, it occurred to Dick that Toma was playing a joke upon them. Piqued and resentful because of his and Sandy's refusal to postpone the exploration of the mine, their guide had probably decided to teach them a lesson. No doubt, he wanted to frighten them a

little in his effort to revenge his wounded feelings. Such an explanation seemed reasonable enough. It caused Dick to smile to himself and presently to chuckle aloud:

"Toma's done this, Sandy. The old boy's a little peeved because we wouldn't listen to him. If we wait here a few minutes, he'll relent and open the trap."

They waited in silence. Sandy nudged Dick and laughed. In order to pass the time quickly, they went over and commenced to examine the sacks of gold, piled against one side of the shaft.

Ten, fifteen, twenty minutes—and no sound from Toma! Dick sat down and began mopping his face again. Sandy blew out his candle, grumbling to himself.

"A joke his its limits," he sputtered. "In about two more seconds——"

Footfalls sounded overhead. A low rumble of voices, a clatter of something on the floor—and the trap came open. Light streamed down, lighting up the shaft.

"Bear!" exclaimed an unfamiliar voice. "Better keep back. They're armed!"

"No, I tell yuh, we got their rifles. Fink," the tone was overbearing and threatening, "get a move on an' throw down that rope."

The rope came down with a dull thud. Then the voice:

"Get out o' that. Scramble up that rope. You're both down there—we know it."

A string of blasphemous oaths accompanied the sharp command. Sandy shrank back close to Dick. They were both shaking with terror.

"Do yuh hear!" screamed Henderson, enraged at the delay. "Your game's up, I tell yuh. I'm givin' yuh just five minutes to come outta that hole."

"I can't," moaned Sandy. "I can't, Dick!"

With difficulty, Dick was gaining control of himself.

"We must, Sandy," he quavered. "There's no help for it. They have the upper hand now. Let me help you to your feet."

Sandy could scarcely stand. He trembled, and raised a white, pathetic face to the opening.

"We're coming, Henderson," Dick called out, his voice ringing tragically.

Slowly, tremblingly, they went up. Dick's head, then his shoulders projected through the opening. Strong, rough arms yanked him forward with a force so violent that his jaws snapped. He was lying on the floor now, Sandy beside him. The leering, uncouth faces above were faces without pity. A circle of eyes, like those of hungry wolves, glared

down at them. Big, powerful—a tower of brute strength and wickedness—Bear Henderson stormed through the group of men, cursing roundly.

"Truss 'em up! Truss 'em up, you fools. Think we got all day to stand around in. Flick—bring that rope!"

The boys were bound hand and foot, then dragged across the floor and kicked into a corner. Through a smother of dust, Dick perceived that the party of outlaws were preparing to make a descent into the mine. Above the din and confusion, came the hoarse, bellowed orders of Henderson.

One by one, the moose-hide sacks, containing the gold stored in the shaft, were lifted up through the trap. A perfect bedlam of cries and shouts arose. Order was forgotten. Sweating men, their faces distorted with greed and passion, clawed over the precious metal, snarling like beasts.

For a time it looked as if Henderson might lose control of the outlaws. With one exception, every man cursed and fought around the moose-hide sacks, turning deaf ears to their leader. This rebellion against authority transformed Henderson from the brute he was to a glaring-eyed madman. Never before in all his life had Dick seen anything to equal the awful fury of the man, as he leaped here and

there through that pack of human wolves and beat them into submission.

In less than five minutes, the man, called Flick, was the only one left of the cowering band who dared to dispute its leader's authority. Flick had backed away, nursing a cut over his right eye, blood trickling down his face. His cheeks were livid. As Henderson rushed towards him, a knife gleamed and whirred through the air, missing the outlaw by a scant two inches. A short time later Baptiste La Lond, the only one of the party who had shown little interest in the sacks of gold, proceeded to remove the unconscious body of Flick. He accomplished this task by the simple expedient of dragging it out by the heels, yanking it brutally along the floor, through the doorway and thence outside.

Immediately the room became more quiet. With a jerk of his head, Henderson tossed back his mop of yellow hair and wiped his face with the back of one hairy hand.

"Any more o' yuh devils lookin' fer trouble—step out!"

No one moved. Sulky faces, many of them battered almost to a pulp, were cast down; shoulders drooped in dejection. Not even the breath of a murmur stirred through their broken ranks.

"Yuh got us licked, Bear, an' yuh know it," trembled one of the outlaws. "We didn't mean no harm jes' lookin' at that gold. There ain't a nugget missin'."

"No, I suppose not," snarled their chief. "Couldn't see nothin', could I? Empty yer pockets fer I knock yuh all down again!"

Hastily, they complied. In spite of the torture of the rope that bound him, Dick choked back a laugh as each one brought to light handful after handful of the tell-tale nuggets and passed them over to their brutal master.

Returning from his gentle mission, Baptiste La Lond sauntered through the door and made his way unhesitatingly over to the corner where Dick and Sandy lay.

"Ah, ze pretty mounted police boy," he chortled, prodding Dick with his foot. "Where is ze fine uniform now?"

Dick stared back in defiance, but made no answer.

"Pardon, monsieur!" Mockingly, La Lond bowed low before him. Then he turned to the outlaws with what he considered to be a humorous gesture.

"Ze leetle boy ees feel sick now—so veree sick. He not feel lak talk today."

One or two of the outlaws guffawed loudly.

"Come out o' that!" growled Henderson. "Leave that boy alone. We got work to do."

Baptiste cringed and slunk away from the corner. Turning upon his men, Henderson raised his voice:

"Listen tuh me, yuh yellow skunks—I'm boss o' this party. If yuh don't believe it, jes' try some more o' your funny tricks. None o' this gold ain't gonna be divided 'til we get back. The police won't find much when they come. Do yuh understand?"

"Yes," came the cowed answer.

"All right!" The outlaw glared about him threateningly before he proceeded: "Now, I'll tell yuh somethin': We got jes' five days to get what we can outta this mine. I'm gonna strip it. These few sacks here ain't all we're gonna get."

"How do yuh figger yer gonna do it?" inquired the man who had previously spoken.

"Work!" boomed Henderson. "We're gonna work this mine four days an' four nights like it's never been worked before. Not countin' them two boys over there, there's ten o' us. Scar-Face'll bring up a few Indians an' I'm gonna make them get busy too. I'm plannin' to run two shifts fer each one o' the shafts. Any o' yuh got any objections?" he inquired belligerently.

"Ze more we get, monsieur, ze more we divide," Baptiste pointed out.

"Sure! That's what I'm tryin' to tell yuh. Now, as I said before, the police is comin'. One o' my Indian runners was here last night with the news. We gotta work fast an' we gotta work sure. If there's any way o' wreckin' the mine before we go, I'm gonna do it."

"We ought to be able to stop the police, Bear," one of the men declared.

"What for? There ain't no sense to it. If yuh devils is willin' to work, we can clean up plenty in a few days."

Greed and avarice was without doubt the only real bond that held the outlaws together. Even the domineering force and brutality of Henderson would have been inadequate to cope for any length of time with so murderous a crew. At thought of the great wealth lying in store for them, the sulky, glowering looks, that were cast in the direction of their leader, faded. The tension slackened. In a very few minutes the room was noisy again—the scene of bustling and excited activity.

CHAPTER XIX

HOURS OF TORTURE

THE afternoon and evening wore on. In their corner, Dick and Sandy passed through an ordeal of suffering that had sapped even their rugged endurance. They lay now with closed eyes, moaning in their sleep. The lips of each were dry and cracked. Dust choked their nostrils. Ankles and wrists throbbed and pained from the constant friction and pressure of the rope with which the outlaws had bound them.

It was not until the following morning that Henderson deigned to notice them. Nor was it pity that prompted him to bellow out at the top of his voice:

"Baptiste, untie them two young swine an' put 'em to work. We need ever' available man. You can take charge of the outfit that's workin' outside on that new shaft."

This was the sort of thing that Baptiste did well. He pounced down upon the benumbed and thirst-

crazed pair with a whoop of delight. He untied their bonds and kicked them to their feet, grinning in derision as they swayed there, totally unable to stand. He shook them roughly, leering into their bloodshot eyes.

"Ah, ze pretty boys," he crooned, "zey will wake up to come with their veree good friend, Baptiste. What you think about that, eh?"

"Stop it!" thundered Henderson, as he turned to go down through the trap. "There ain't no time to fool. Them boys'll be all right in a few minutes. Rub their legs. Go an' fetch 'em some grub."

By the time Baptiste had returned, the blood had commenced to circulate in Dick's and Sandy's swollen limbs, but it was nearly two hours before they were able to stagger forth to join the party of Indian workers, who were engaged at that particular moment in bailing water from the shaft situated about one hundred yards from the cabin.

In the group, very much to the boys' surprise, was Toma. Their guide stood turning the handle of the windlass as they approached, and, except for a faint flicker in his eyes, one might have thought that the tall, lithe Indian lad looked upon the two newcomers for the first time in his life. Impassively he went

on with his work when Dick and Sandy took their places with the rest and were given instructions by Baptiste.

"I'll be here to watch you veree close," he warned them. "Et ees a good thing for you ef you move veree quick when I say."

Concluding this threatening speech, he pushed them roughly in the direction of two wooden buckets, and bade them commence at once. Dick was raging with suppressed anger; Sandy was furious. They picked up the buckets, nevertheless, and walked back to the shaft. Greatly pleased with himself, Baptiste sat down on a flat rock and puffed contentedly on his pipe.

In the very next moment, the boys were given their first opportunity to look directly into the eyes of Toma, and were rewarded with a sly wink. Pretending to brush the perspiration from his face, Toma's finger stole to his lips.

Either Dick or Sandy would have given a good deal just then to have been able to speak to their guide. But they realized that this was impossible. Baptiste's duty it was to see that the work progressed rapidly and Henderson had given strict orders that there was to be no talking. To disobey this iron-clad rule would result in swift punishment, either

at the hands of La Lond or some other person equally as brutal.

It did not take the boys long to discover that Baptiste was a hard taskmaster. He was continually among them, exhorting them to redouble their efforts and speed up the work, bullying and tormenting them in every way possible. On one occasion he jabbed Toma in the ribs with the muzzle of his revolver and threatened to throw him down the shaft if he didn't step more lively.

Toma blinked, but held his peace. In a few minutes his face was as inscrutable as ever.

The work party at the new shaft consisted of four persons besides Dick, Toma and Sandy. These four were Indians recruited for the purpose from the tribe with whom Scar-Face had aligned himself. They were all tall, swarthy young men of about Dick's own age. They had entered upon their duties with a good deal of enthusiasm, but at the end of an hour or two, the uninteresting, monotonous work palled upon them. Shortly after Dick's and Sandy's arrival, they had begun to regret their promises to Scar-Face and slackened down on the job.

This action on their part placed Baptiste in a rather peculiar position. Neither could he speak their language, nor dare to employ the brutal methods he

did not hestitate to use in the case of the three prisoners. Time and time again, he strode forward with grim purpose in his eyes, only to check himself, growl out a burning oath and return sullenly to his seat on the rock. A climax was reached finally when Henderson, on his regular round of inspection, paused to peep down in the shaft.

His sudden, violent verbal explosive caused every member of the work party, including Baptiste, to jump.

"This water ain't goin' down a danged inch," he snarled. "What's wrong?"

"Ah, monsieur——" La Lond wrung his hands in desperation. "Ah, monsieur, zer ees a veree great trouble. Ze Indians, ze Indians, monsieur!"

"Well, what about 'em?"

"Zey will not hurry one leetle bit. Zey are veree slow, veree slow, monsieur."

Henderson flung himself away with a torrent of oaths.

"Make 'em work!" he bellowed over his shoulder. "If there ain't more done when I come back next time—look out! I'm holdin' yuh responsible, La Lond. Get busy!"

Baptiste proceeded to get busy with a vengeance. Smarting under the rebuke, he advanced savagely

upon his unsuspecting workmen, brandishing his gun. Before his furious advance, three of the Indians scrambled back to their buckets in alarm. The fourth, Dick observed, was not so easily frightened. He stood his ground calmly, drew himself to his full height and folded his arms. Dick's heart beat with admiration—but only for a moment; for La Lond's hand went back, revolver clubbed, then forward with a sickening thud.

The blow had caught the Indian squarely on the side of the head, knocking him flat. At sight of such inexcusable brutality, something within Dick seemed to snap. Leaping across the space that separated him from the outlaw, he struck out with all the force of his right arm. Baptiste sat down with a grunt.

He was still sitting there when Henderson, drawn by the commotion and the loud screech from Sandy, came hurrying up.

"What's wrong here?" he thundered.

Baptiste was too dazed just then to make a very satisfactory reply. Holding his chin in his hands, he mumbled incoherently. Dick looked up squarely into the eyes of Henderson.

"I struck Baptiste myself," he acknowledged.

"What fer?"

"Because he clubbed the Indian with his gun."

"I'll settle with yuh later," Henderson scowled, making a sudden swipe at Dick with his open hand. "Get back to work. Get back to work all o' yuh. Hereafter, I'm runnin' this little show."

It was several minutes before the Indian recovered consciousness and staggered to his feet, his three comrades gathered about him. The four of them glared at Baptiste, who stood cowering in front of Henderson.

"Baptiste," roared the outlaw, "go and fetch Scar-Face. Tell him I want to see him. Tell him that I want to see him blamed quick. Either these Indians is gonna start to work or I'll know the reason why. Yuh shore made a pretty mess o' things, ain't yuh?"

"Et ees impossible, monsieur. Scar-Face has gone to ze Indian village."

"Find some other breed then what can talk to these Nitchies. Get!"

Baptiste had no sooner slunk out of sight, than the four Indians, favoring Henderson with a few chilling glances, started off across the rugged slope toward the footpath, supporting their injured companion. In vain did Henderson call out, entreating them to return. The four figures did not hesitate, did not once look back until they had gained the more even ground on the slope beyond. Then one of

them turned, waving his arms defiantly in the air.

A flood of abusive oaths broke forth from the lips of the exasperated outlaw.

"Go on! Go on!" he screeched after them. "Yuh ain't no good anyway. Yuh ain't no good fer nothin', yuh yellow scum!"

With a final livid oath, he turned quickly and strode away in the direction of the cabin.

CHAPTER XX

HENDERSON'S PLANS MISCARRY

"He doesn't seem to care whether we run away or not," observed Sandy, when the outlaw had passed out of hearing. "Shall we make a try, Dick?"

Dick shook his head.

"We wouldn't go far. I'd rather stay here and take my chances."

Toma dropped the handle of the windlass and walked over to his two friends. His eyes were shining.

"You think I play mean trick when I drop trap yesterday," he began. "I think mebbe you feel mad at Toma."

"No," protested Dick, "but tell us how it all happened. What did they do, Toma?"

"I stand look out door mebbe not more than ten minutes, when I see plenty men come along ridge. No time to do much. Henderson close already. No good shoot; no good run away. First thing I think about you an' Sandy. I try shout down hole,

but you no hear. Men come closer all time. I run to door then back to hole. I shout once more, but you no hear. Pretty soon I have good idea. I think mebbe I close trap and scrape dust over it. Henderson him not find where you, Sandy are. By time I pull up rope and close hole bad fellows just outside cabin. When they come in, I give up. Fellows take our guns. Henderson speak out:

" 'Where other fellow go?'

"I tell him lie. I say you, Sandy run away. He no believe that. He see you, Sandy gun an' shoulder-pack. He ask me many, many times where you go, but always I tell him same thing. Bye-'n'-bye one bad fellow pull knife an' prick me three, four, five times so it hurt very much. He keep on until I stand it no longer, so I tell him where you, Sandy go, an' where he find 'em plenty sacks of gold."

As proof of the truth of his story, Toma opened his shirt, exhibiting his bare, scarred breast. Sandy turned away, a mist filming his eyes. Here indeed was conclusive proof of the terrible ordeal through which Toma had passed.

"They'll pay for this all some day," Dick prophesied. "They can't keep on doing these awful things and expect never to be punished for them."

It was late that night before they were relieved from their arduous labors and were permitted to

eat or rest. Accompanied by one of the outlaws, they were sent back to an opening among the rocks, where a camp had been erected during the afternoon. At one side of the camp was a large tepee, which served as a sort of mess-hall for the men, while on the opposite side, flanked by rocks and somewhat sheltered by them, was a level strip of ground which afforded ample room for sleeping.

They ate supper in the tepee with several of the other men and when they had finished their guide led them over to the space reserved for sleeping quarters.

"Yuh can roll out your blankets here," he said gruffly. "But yuh better keep your traps closed if yuh don't want to get in trouble."

Although it was not yet dark, Dick's watch showed that it was after eleven o'clock. Northern twilight, brooding across the land, lent a certain weirdness and eeriness to the camp. Here and there, beyond the sleeping forms of Henderson's first shift, blinked the red embers of several campfires. Around one of these were three outlaws, drinking from a large bottle. Their coarse voices and loud disputes could be plainly heard by the boys. As Dick lay watching them, unable to sleep, he observed the approach of two other men, whose figures seemed somehow vaguely familiar. Passing by, on their way over to

the three tipplers, he recognized them immediately. They were Lee and Pierre, the two packers, who had deserted his own party less than a week before.

Dick was on the verge of waking Sandy to inform him of this discovery, when a third person, no other than Henderson himself, made his way hastily forward and paused just a few feet away from where the three boys lay.

"Are yuh there, Brennan?" he called out.

"Yep," one of the men answered from the campfire.

"Come here!"

Brennan lost no time in obeying the summons.

"Yes, Bear, what is it?"

"Scar-Face jes' got back to camp from the river," Henderson informed him. "He tells me that we'd better watch out fer the Indians tonight. They're gettin' dangerous. The hull outfit is buzzin' around like a swarm of mad hornets. He thinks they're comin' over."

"What fer?"

Henderson cleared his throat.

"All on account o' that Indian kid La Lond cracked over the head this afternoon. He's the chief's son."

Brennan laughed. Alcohol had given him unlimited courage—of a sort. Just then he was worried

more about the diminishing contents of the bottle than the chance possibility of an attack by Indians.

"Let 'em come," he declared drunkenly. "What do we care? You ain't afraid of a few Nitchies with bows an' arrers, are yuh, Bear?"

"There's close to two hundred of 'em, not countin' a few strays they may be able to pick up. We ain't got fifteen men."

"Well, what do yuh think we'd better do?"

"I don't think—I know. That's what I came all the way over here fer. Wake up all the men, except them three kids, an' give 'em rifles. Tell 'em to be ready an' waitin' in case the Indians decide to come over. I gotta supply of guns an' ammunition over at the cabin, an' I'll look after that end if you'll look after this."

"I don't think there's no danger," argued Brennan. "Why don't you send Scar-Face back to sorta quiet 'em down?"

"Scar-Face has got a broken arrow in him already. He won't live 'til mornin'."

Brennan considered this startling news for a brief space.

"All right, I'll do as you say, Bear."

When Brennan and Henderson had left, Dick lay quietly, pondering over the information. Were the Indians really planning an attack? Would they dare

to do such a thing, fearful as they were of the white man's guns? He sat up, blankets tucked around him, and listened intently, half expecting to hear the sound of the invaders prowling around in the rocks above. Brennan had returned to his cronies and regaled them with the conversation he had had with Henderson. Loud bursts of drunken laughter followed the recital.

"The ol' man's gettin' so he's afeared of his own shadow," chortled one of them. "'Magine them Nitchies tryin' to attack us. It don't make sense. Why I ain't a bit scairt to fight the hull blamed outfit alone. Pah!"

"He told me to wake up ever'body an' give 'em guns," giggled Brennan.

Another roar of laughter greeted this remark. When it had subsided, Pierre, amid wild shouts of approval, produced a second bottle from somewhere about his person, took a long draught himself, and passed it around.

It was the beginning of a mad debauch. In disgust, Dick turned his head and silently regarded the forms of his two sleeping companions. Should he awaken them? For a moment he hesitated. He put out one hand toward Sandy, gently touching the face of his chum, smoothing back the lock of hair that had fallen over the tired forehead.

An outlandish yowl sounded from the direction of the campfire. The noise had disturbed Toma, for he stirred restlessly and finally sat up.

"What I hear?" he demanded sleepily.

"A few drunken fools——" began Dick.

He did not complete the sentence. A concerted, nerve-wracking screech broke across the area above them. Its echo trembled for a moment in the still air, then suddenly the camp filled, as if by a miracle, with scores of hideous forms, darting here and there through the gathering darkness.

CHAPTER XXI

THE RED FURY

It was an avenging red fury that swept down upon them.

Huddled in his blankets, Dick beheld a sight that caused him to shrink back in mute terror. The camp was alive with invaders. Hideous shouts rose on all sides. Rifles crashed. Through the gray twilight, appearing like scurrying phantoms from another world, the attacking party had hurled itself upon the outlaws' encampment.

Brennan and his four companions had been among the first to attempt flight. In desperation, reeling drunkenly as they hurried along, they struck out in the direction of the cabin three hundred yards away. As they passed opposite the three boys, four grisly forms leaped out from the rocks just ahead and darted towards them. Dick could hear the courageous Brennan squeaking like a rat before he turned again to make off. Without thought of the possible consequences, they had swung about and raced wildly back, screaming at the top of their lungs.

The din and commotion increased. Over at the mine a furious fusillade of rifle shots attested to the fact that Henderson and the other outlaws, who occupied the cabin, were resisting stubbornly every effort on the part of the Indians to storm the stronghold. The shouting had become deafening. Pine torches in the hands of scores of the besiegers began fluttering across the slope, thence up to the cabin. In an incredibly short space of time a dense cloud of smoke enveloped the low structure. Wide tongues of flame leaped up, mounting quickly to every part of the building.

Since the beginning of the attack, the three boys had made no effort to escape. Sandy, weak with terror, clung to Dick while Dick himself, nearly as badly frightened, sat shivering close to Toma. On several occasions Indians had passed within a few feet of them, but had gone on. It occurred to Dick that the reason their presence had not yet been discovered was because they had pitched their blankets at the very foot of the cliff, where the shadows were deepest. This thought gave birth to an inspiration. A ray of hope flashed into Dick's mind. Would it not be possible, keeping within the dark shadow of the cliff, to creep along to the far side of the encampment undetected, thence make their way up through the sheltering rocks to the top of the plateau?

It was perhaps a forlorn hope, yet it offered possibilities.

In a low whisper, Dick told of his plan. A moment later the three boys crept stealthily forth with wildly beating hearts. Inch by inch, they wormed their way over the uneven ground. It required a full half hour of ceaseless, uninterrupted crawling to negotiate the eastern side of the wide, natural opening among the rocks. Scarcely daring to breathe, they commenced the ascent. It was darker now, but the glaring reflection from the burning cabin fell across their path directly above.

"They'll see us up there," Sandy panted. "We can't make it."

"Our only chance," returned Dick. "Come on!"

They reached the top of the plateau in a panic of fear. Had they been seen? Dick put one shaking hand on Sandy's shoulder and pointed to a low barrier of rocks.

"Make for it!" he quavered, gulping at the lump in his throat.

They broke into a run. Thirty, forty, fifty yards —they were tearing along now at top speed, hurdling the low obstructions, darting around the higher slabs of sandstone that stood in their road. Madly they raced for another twenty yards—and stopped!

They had run straight into the arms of two power-

ful Indians. It had been impossible to see them coming. Dick checked himself so suddenly that he nearly fell. Sandy emitted a startled, agonized shriek, while Toma, unable to stop, plunged ahead, colliding with the foremost of their adversaries and sent him reeling back with crushing force against a rock.

Dick and the second Indian came to grips a moment later. A murderous-looking knife flashed down in a short half-circle, but Sandy seized the hand that held it and clung grimly there until Dick had contrived to tear himself away from the smothering embrace. He was gasping for breath as he drew back. Encumbered with Sandy, the Indian shook himself like a huge mastiff, but Dick's clinched fist drove forward with telling effect. Seeing their temporary advantage, the boys were away again in a rush, Toma—somewhat dazed by the collision—bringing up the rear.

As they raced farther and farther away from the encampment, hope mounted in their breasts.

"We'll get away yet," Dick puffed. "We'll make it, Sandy. Don't lose heart."

They crossed a narrow swale, still running at top speed, and, continuing eastward, came at length to a small meadow which extended to one side of the plateau. The thickening dusk had become darkness.

Far behind them they could hear only faintly the noise of the attack. The red glow of the burning cabin had almost subsided. The three boys tumbled in the grass and lay still. Their breath came in choking gasps. Perspiration oozed out from every pore in their bodies.

Pausing only for a short rest, they hurried on again, turning more to the northward. Once or twice Dick or Sandy stopped to listen, fearful lest the two Indians they had encountered might be following them.

"I can't believe we've managed to get away so easily," Dick declared.

"It doesn't seem possible," replied Sandy. "They'll be sure to follow us."

They struggled on. It was difficult now to pick their way without stumbling into ruts and slipping over rocks. They had left the meadow behind. On every hand, boulders, stones, tall jagged cliffs surrounded them. Their brisk walk had changed to a mere snail's pace.

"We no get on very fast," complained Toma at the end of another half hour. "I think mebbe we made mistake come this way. Take all night to go one, two miles."

"Let's turn more to the left," suggested Dick. "That may lead us out of here."

Toma's keen sense of hearing was responsible for their next full stop a few minutes later. Groping out with his two arms he caught Dick by the sleeve and Sandy by the back of his coat. Frantically, he pulled them back.

"I think I hear someone." His whispered warning was scarcely audible. "Don't move unless want to die. Somebody come."

A small stone rattled down the sharp incline immediately ahead of them. A gutteral voice broke across the stillness.

"Indians!" breathed Sandy. "Quick!"

With alacrity, the three quaking refugees pivoted about. For a few paces they hurried forward. Another stone rattled down almost at their feet. In dismay, they came to a sudden halt.

"Trapped!" gurgled Dick.

His legs were growing limp under him. Fearfully, his eyes endeavored to pierce the surrounding darkness. Was it illusion, or did he actually see something?

Vague shapes took human form. Dick had barely time to reach out and draw his two companions closer to him, to squeeze Sandy's hand, and brace himself for the final shock—when the blow fell. One long, piercing, fiendish scream cut the silence. A wild scramble, hideous faces leering out of the

dark, the sensation of being pummelled, struck, thrown back; the faint memory of a strangled sob—then complete oblivion!

When he woke to consciousness, Dick was being bounced and jerked about in a most unusual and disconcerting way. He tried to raise his arms above his head, but the effort proved futile. His wrists were bound. Across his chest and around his legs he could feel the pressure of tightly drawn rope. By turning his head slightly and squinting down along the curved surface of the object under him—to which he had been tied—he discovered the cause of his trouble.

He was strapped to a horse. The horse was slipping and sliding over treacherous underfooting, and was one in a long string of similar pack animals. The pack-train was advancing through the uncertain light of early morning, moving very slowly to the accompaniment of hoarse, guttural shouts.

In a sudden flash, the memory of the events of the preceding night came back. Up to a certain point he retained a vivid, clear-cut impression of everything that had passed—the Indian attack at Henderson's encampment, the flight across the plateau and finally the harrowing experience among the rocks. What had happened afterwards he did not know. Had Sandy and Toma been killed? Why had the

Indians taken him prisoner? Where were they going now, and what did they purpose to do with him when they got there?

But whatever fate lay in store for him—it mattered little. Just then Dick was not particularly concerned with worry over himself. His mental images had taken a gruesome and awful shape. Before his eyes he could see the bruised and lifeless bodies of his two chums—Sandy and Toma. A burning sob escaped him. He turned his head again, gazing up in the gray, shadowy vault of the sky.

With the coming of the morning light Dick saw that the country around no longer possessed the aspect of grim, forbidding desolation. The plateau had been left far behind. They were now winding their way over a beautiful rolling woodland, whose varied scenic effects were pleasing to the eye. At one place the ponies forded a shallow creek and a little farther on skirted the shore of a lovely lake. This lake was narrow and long, sparkling like an emerald in the slanting rays of the morning sun.

And then Dick perceived, with a sigh of relief, the Indian village. Scores of brown tepees nestled among the trees on the north side of the lake. Blue pinions of smoke floated lazily through the still air above the pines.

Dick could scarcely believe that the howling de-

mons of the night before could in any way be associated with this pastoral scene. A drowsy peace lay over the village. Men and women sauntered here and there. Children played in the white belt of sand that sloped gently away toward the lake.

The pack-train turned quickly to the right and threaded its way along a narrow path through the trees and a few minutes later drew up in a cleared space at one end of the village. Their approach had been heralded by an ear-splitting yowling of dogs and the noisy clamor of a small regiment of half-naked children. During the general excitement following their arrival, Dick began to believe that his own existence had been entirely overlooked. Did they intend to leave him strapped to the pony all day? Was it some new brand of torture devised for his particular case?

He was still brooding, when three particularly ferocious-looking warriors drew away from the noisy hubbub and approached. Without a moment's hesitation, they proceeded to untie the moose-hide thongs and drag him down from his perch. In an incredibly short time, he was lying in the grass at their feet, the cynosure of hundreds of curious eyes.

Dick sat up and rubbed his wrists and ankles. He wriggled his toes. He made an unsuccessful effort to

rise. His legs were as numb and useless as those of a paralytic.

Two of the Indians who had released him helped him to his feet and, thus supported, he was taken through the gaping crowd to a tepee nearby. Here he was given food and water, one of the Indians remaining behind to guard him.

"I suppose they'll keep me confined here for the rest of the day," thought Dick. "They're probably holding a council of war right now to decide what's to be done with me."

As the hours passed, Dick's guard sat stoically watching him. There was no expression in the calm, deeply-lined face. Except for an occasional flutter of his eye-lids, one might have thought that the silent, tranquil figure had been carved out of stone.

When the numbness had left his legs, Dick rose to his feet, and, as the inactivity was unendurable, he began pacing back and forth across the narrow, confining space. The exercise succeeded in restoring his sluggish circulation. He felt so much better that he wished he might be permitted to go out and walk along the shore of the lake. The flap of the tepee had been pulled back, revealing an inviting prospect of cool blue water and green trees.

From time to time, visitors came to glance in at

the prisoner. Occasionally these were women and children, but more often dark-visaged warriors, clad in moose-hide jackets and trousers that had been beautifully embroidered in some kind of brightly-dyed fiber thread. Dick became greatly absorbed in noting the various designs. There were totem poles, bears, caribou, and animals of all descriptions. One Indian had a picture of the sun emblazoned across his wide chest.

He was occupied on one occasion in admiring a particularly interesting sample of this native handiwork when he was startled by an explosive grunt. When he looked up quickly, it was to meet the gaze of a young Indian, whom he had seen somewhere before. He was probably one of the men who had conducted the pack-train, Dick thought. Then, suddenly, he remembered. An involuntary cry of recognition escaped from his lips. It was the son of the chief—the victim of Baptiste's brutal attack.

Dick's heart was beating joyfully as he sprang forward to grasp the outstretched hand.

CHAPTER XXII

IN THE INDIAN VILLAGE

The young Indian's first act was to dismiss the guard and wave aside the inquisitive group that had gathered outside the tepee. Then he turned towards Dick, jabbering excitedly, his face wreathed with smiles. He patted the prisoner on the back and laughed uproariously.

His manner indicated plainly his surprise and joy at the unexpected meeting.

"This is a huge joke," he seemed to be trying to say. "Please don't worry any more—O fair-skinned stranger. I am the chief's son. I have unlimited authority. No one shall harm you."

He went through an amusing pantomime for a few moments, then clutched Dick by the arm and drew him quickly outside, making a sign for him to follow. He led the way to a large tepee, kicked aside the flap and motioned Dick to enter.

The chief, sitting cross-legged just opposite the entrance, was startled into sudden wakefulness by the unexpected interruption. He had, it was quite

apparent, been indulging in an early morning nap. His manner was not especially cordial, Dick thought, yet this impression vanished a moment later when, at the conclusion of his son's brief explanation, he rose with great dignity, crossed over and placed a reassuring hand on Dick's head.

This ceremony over, the young Indian smiled, took his charge in tow again and they were off—this time to the far end of the village. Tepee after tepee they visited, going through the same monotonous performance. Then Dick received a shock. The last tepee they had entered did not contain the usual swarthy, dignified inmate. The atmosphere was wholly different here. Dick drew back with a startled cry, while a feeling of revulsion swept over him. Baptiste La Lond, a shivering white-faced wreck, sat with his back propped against a small pile of firewood and, close by, snoring as contentedly as if nothing had ever happened, sprawled the huge bulk of Bear Henderson.

"Ah, monsieur," whimpered the abject, cowering wretch, "so you too haf suffered ze terrible misfortune. Veree soon we die. Zees barbarians haf no heart. Zey thirst for our veree blood. O monsieur, I am stricken. I feel ze so terrible, terrible position."

"You look it!" Dick growled at him.

Dick felt that he should have been sorry for the

unhappy Frenchman, but for various reasons he could not. Sympathy would have been wasted upon him. To a certain extent both Henderson and this cringing outlaw deserved the fate that most assuredly awaited them.

The chief's son nudged his arm and they had turned away, when Baptiste again broke forth:

"Where ees ze rope?"

"What rope?"

"Why are you not bound, monsieur?"

"They took the rope off," answered Dick non-committally.

"An' your two friends—are zey too without ze rope?"

"I haven't seen either one of them since the attack. I think they are dead," Dick choked.

"Et ees not so, monsieur. With my own eyes I see them both. Zey come along on ze same pack-train. Ze leetle fellow cry most ze way like beeg baby. Somewhere, I tell you, zey are here."

With that startling information ringing in his ears, Dick was led outside. The young Indian scowlingly shook his head and pointed back at the tepee which sheltered the outlaws. Still scowling, he plucked two broad leaves from a weed growing at his feet, squatted on his haunches, placed the two leaves on the ground in front of him and, with a cry

of rage, drove his long-bladed hunting knife through each in turn.

It was not difficult to comprehend that sort of sign language, and Dick signified that he understood. Well he knew that it was a mock murder—with Henderson and La Lond as the victims.

Watching his rescuer, suddenly Dick had an inspiration. Might it not be possible to learn the whereabouts of Sandy and Toma through the medium of this sign language. If Baptiste's statement had been correct, his two chums were imprisoned somewhere in the village. If only he could make the young Indian understand.

With that purpose in view, Dick selected two smaller leaves growing on the same weed. Speaking sharply to his new friend in order to make sure that he had gained his strict attention, he stroked the leaves against his face, coddled them in his hands, brushed them against his lips, and in other ways attempted to show his love for them. That the leaves represented two persons, the Indian knew, of course; but Dick's efforts apparently had overshot their mark. He had hit the wrong target. The chief's son evidently believed, judging from the sudden savage scowl on his face, that Dick was attempting to make known his friendship for the two outlaws.

Dick pointed to the outlaw's tent and then at the

two leaves he still held in the palm of his hand and shook his head vigorously. The scowl disappeared. With a small twig, he drew in the sand a crude likeness of two tepees. Within one of the tepees he placed the remnants of the leaves which had been mutilated by the Indian's knife and in the other the two leaves he had himself selected, first being very careful to wind long blades of grass around each of them. The blades of grass, he hoped, would carry to the Indian's mind the suggestion he wished to convey—rope wound around the ankles and wrists of his chums.

There followed a few more explanatory gestures—and Dick gazed eagerly across to his benefactor. Had the young Indian grasped the message? The minutes seemed interminable as the two squatted there in the sand.

To Dick's great disappointment, the chief's son shook his head as if in doubt. Evidently he knew nothing of Sandy and Toma. However, he rose quickly to his feet and with a grunt to his eager companion hurried away through the trees, returning a few minutes afterward accompanied by three men. As he approached Dick he smiled and gesticulated excitedly.

"Come!" said one of the Indians.

Dick started in surprise.

"You speak English!" he shouted joyfully.

"Come!" solemnly repeated the Indian.

Motioning to Dick, the four struck off sharply to the right. They passed a few tepees, the last at that end of the village, and plunged straight on through a thicket of saskatoon, very much to Dick's bewilderment. At the opposite side of the thicket a path, evidently used as a pack-trail, threaded its way through a dense growth of underbrush. Where were they taking him? A few hundred yards farther on, Dick stopped short, resolved not to take another step until he had satisfied himself that the party was not leading him astray.

"Where are we going?" he demanded of the Indian who had spoken the one word of English.

There ensued an interval of silence, in which the four Indians stared at Dick in mild disapproval. Then a wild chattering broke forth. They surrounded their dazed and discomfited protege, gesticulating almost savagely. Before their well-intended onslaught Dick shrank back in dismay.

Perceiving the uselessness of such tactics, the chief's son approached the now thoroughly alarmed young man, smiling affably. He patted Dick's arm reassuringly and pointed to the trail ahead.

"Come!" he said in a soothing voice, imitating the Indian who spoke English so fluently.

"Good! You come!" cried the fluent one, his face distorted in what probably was intended for a smile.

"All right," grinned Dick. "I come."

In high spirits they set out again. In less than twenty minutes they came upon a wide natural clearing, dotted here and there with the tepees of another Indian encampment. A few minutes later, Dick's heart pounding in his throat, they entered the narrow opening of one of the tepees.

"Dick!" immediately shrieked a voice. "You! You! *You!*——"

With a cry that sounded like the screech of a calliope, Dick bounded forward and caught his chum in his arms.

"Sandy!" he almost blubbered. "Toma!— Everything's all right! Gee!— I've found you— Don't worry—Gosh! I've been nearly crazy, thinking, thinking——"

Tears were welling in Sandy's eyes.

"Did you drop from the clouds?" he inquired brokenly. "Say, Dick, we've been through hell."

"Don't worry any more," Dick comforted him. "We're all right now. These Indians have come to release you. Just think of it, Sandy—we're free. Free! Do you hear me, Sandy?"

"Yes, I hear you. But why——"

"The chief's son—— We owe our lives to him."

"Why chief's son do that?" Toma demanded. "Mebbe they make you like fool."

Dick turned quickly and grasped the guides drooping shoulder in a friendly grip.

"Listen, Toma. Look at that young Indian standing over there," he pointed as he spoke. "Ever see him before?"

Toma blinked a number of times, then suddenly started.

"Sure!" he broke forth excitedly. "I know him. Young Indian fellow Baptiste strike 'em hard with revolver that day over at mine."

"I'm beginning to see light," Sandy cut in quickly. "We owe our lives to you, Dick. Because you knocked Baptiste down that day, after he'd struck the chief's son, he—— he——"

"Is showing his gratitude," Dick completed the sentence.

Then the three boys looked up expectantly. With a slow, measured tread, the subject of their discourse advanced with great solemnity and, bending over each of the prisoners in turn, cut the moose-hide thongs that bound them.

"Hurrah!" shouted Sandy. Then facing about, turning his head slowly, he looked up at Dick. "I was never happier—never quite so happy as I am right now," he declared fervently.

CHAPTER XXIII

GUESTS OF THE CHIEF

THERE was much to think about, much to tell during the next few hours. Over and over again, Sandy related the story of his capture, lingering over certain details which lent themselves to dramatic exploitation.

"I was certain that you were dead," he told Dick for the hundredth time. "I saw them carry your body away and I could have sworn that there wasn't a breath of life in it. If ever there was a corpse that looked——"

"Forget about it," Dick hastily interrupted. "I'm pretty much alive now—and that's all that matters. When you come to think of it, we've been more than fortunate. How we've managed to get out of this scrape without suffering seriously is a mystery to me. We've lost a little weight, a little sleep, a little skin and cuticle here and there, but——"

"And we've lost the mine," Sandy interrupted him.

"To whom?" Dick demanded.

"To Henderson or the Indians—I'm not sure which."

"Do you mean to tell me that you don't know where Henderson is?"

"Why should I? I haven't seen him, have I?"

Dick reached over and laughingly shook his friend.

"Wake up, Sandy. Of course, you have. Baptiste told me that you and Toma, Henderson and he himself all came out here on the same pack-train. He said that you cried all the time like a big baby."

Sandy sprang to his feet, his face crimson with rage.

"He's a liar! Maybe they came out with us all right, but if he says that he's—he's mistaken. I didn't! I swear it, Dick. Toma will vouch for me. I was a bit hysterical, of course and—and badly frightened. I might have moaned once or twice. You know how it is. But that's all—positively!"

"Where Henderson an' Baptiste now?" Toma asked, smiling furtively.

"Over at the other village. They're both trussed up, and there's a sentry guarding them. I'd hate to be in their shoes."

"Serves 'em right," growled Sandy.

"So I don't see why we can't get complete and undisputed possession of the mine. We've won out,

Sandy. Just think of it—not a single obstacle in the road."

"And you think the Indians won't want it—won't molest us if we go back there?"

"Exactly."

Dick gazed dreamily through the tepee opening. The late afternoon sunlight fell radiantly across the earth. Through the trees at the far side of the meadow he caught sight of the rippling, blue waters of the lake.

"Do you know," he spoke earnestly, "there's a certain thing I'd like to do, if you fellows are willing."

"What is it?"

"Show our appreciation and gratitude to the Indians in some definite way," responded Dick. "I guess we all realize the extent of our indebtedness. We owe them everything—our lives, the mine, the right to go and come unmolested. We've gained their friendship and their respect; we have them on our side to help us. I'm confident that they'll prove to be as loyal friends as anyone could expect."

"I'd rather have them our friends than our enemies," shivered Sandy.

"So would I. And I'm going to make a proposal. Let's divide our ownership in the mine with them, all of us sharing equally in the profits."

"But they don't care for money," protested Sandy. "Gold! What does it mean to them? Nothing! It would be a whole lot more sensible to stake them to a winter's grub-stake. I think they'd appreciate it more."

"That's exactly what I'm coming to," declared Dick. "My proposal is to divide the property in this way: We'll own a half interest, the Indians the other half. It will be necessary to appoint a guardian for the Indians. This guardian will look after their interest and——"

"Spend their money!" laughed Sandy.

"Sure. Buy them the things they really need and can enjoy—food, guns, knives, traps, clothing. As long as the mine continues to produce, they'll never, never want for any of these things."

"It sounds all right. It would work out all right, too, if only we could find an honest, absolutely trustworthy guardian."

"What about the Royal North West Mounted," suggested Dick.

"By George! You have it. They'll be the guardians!" Sandy rose in his enthusiasm and smote Toma a resounding whack. "What do you think of it, old sober-face? We haven't heard from you yet."

"I think 'em mighty fine idea," their guide responded quickly.

The chief's son appeared at this juncture and smiled at them through the opening.

"Come," he requested gutturally.

"I think he wants us to accompany him back to his own village," said Dick, when they had hurried outside.

This proved to be the case. Through the brilliant, warm sunshine of late afternoon they followed the lithe young native along the path that led back to the first and larger village. Arriving there, the boys were escorted directly to the chief's tepee, where a large crowd had gathered. The chief himself, now fully arrayed in resplendant regal garb, awaited their coming. As the small party drew up before him, he advanced solemnly, raised one arm in a commanding gesture and everyone sat down, including the chief's son and the three boys.

"What's the old beggar going to do now?" Sandy whispered.

"I don't know," Dick scratched his head in perplexity. "It's probably a meeting of some sort."

Toma leaned over and nudged Dick in the ribs.

"Indians make ready for big feast. Look!"

A corpulent, kindly-looking squaw, closely followed by four Indian girls, appeared suddenly in their midst, carrying huge trays or platters, which were heaped high with what looked like roasted

venison. The first tray was placed on the ground in front of the chief, the next before the boys, while the remaining three were deposited at different points of vantage amongst the assembly. The hostess with her four comely helpers disappeared, only to return a moment later, bearing other trays piled with food.

Altogether it was a novel experience. It was the first time that the boys had ever attended a regal function of this kind, and they thoroughly enjoyed it. At the conclusion of the feast, the crowd fell back, forming itself in a wide circle. Within the unoccupied center space strode three grotesquely-attired braves, carrying a short section of a hollow log, over one end of which moose-hide had been tightly stretched.

The booming notes of the crude, home-made drum trembled forth its invitation to the dance. A weird, unearthly yowling was struck up. Warrior after warrior leaped into the cleared space and began spinning about, to the accompaniment of a yip-yip-yihing that reminded Dick of the howling of wolves.

Through the long evening and late into the night the dance continued, growing more hideous and noisy with each passing hour. So violently did a number of the participants disport themselves that

they dropped to the ground in utter exhaustion, but leaping up again as soon as they had recovered sufficiently to make such an effort possible.

Dick and Sandy had grown weary of watching long before the dance broke up, yet as guests of honor they hesitated about making known their wish to retire for the night.

"I'm so sleepy I can't hold my head up much longer," Sandy declared. "But just look at Toma—he's enjoying every minute of it. I honestly believe the old boy is anxious to get out there himself."

Hearing the remark, the guide turned a flushed, excited face toward Sandy and grinned good-naturedly.

"You bet! I like go there myself. Mebbe sometime I show you how good I make 'em like that dance."

"I'll take your word for it," answered Sandy.

Squaws and children kept adding fresh fuel to the three huge campfires that had been kindled within the dancing space. In their bright glare there came presently a group of Indians, attired in complete war regalia, and closely following them, still another group, half-carrying, half-dragging two pitiable, quaking forms.

Dick's heart seemed to stand still when he had

recognized the identity of the two victims—no other than Henderson and Baptiste La Lond! With a shaking finger, he pointed them out to Sandy and Toma.

"Great Caesar! I hope the Indians are not going to torture them right here in front of our eyes," Sandy exclaimed.

The approach of the group of warriors had been the signal for the dance to cease, although the drum still kept up a low, muffled roll. Dick turned to Toma.

"What do you think they're about to do, Toma?" he quavered.

"Me not sure yet."

"But will they kill them?"

The guide shook his head.

"Mebbe tomorrow morning—but not tonight. Tonight I think chief an' brave fighting men hold big meeting to decide what they do. Pretty sure, Baptiste, Henderson no get killed tonight."

"Yes, it's a meeting," cried Sandy. "See—they're all sitting down. Look, Dick, the chief is rising to his feet. Toma—run over and find out what they're going to do."

When Toma returned, nearly an hour later, the meeting had ended and the two prisoners were being dragged back to their former prison.

"I no find out very much," he greeted them.

"Indians make different talk from my people. I hear only few words I understand. I find out just enough know that they take 'em Baptiste, Henderson long way off tomorrow."

"What did the chief do when he walked over and stood in front of them?" asked Sandy. "From here it looked as if he had stooped over to cut or untie their ropes."

"I not understand that part," replied Toma. "Chief stoop down all right but he no untie. He give Baptiste, Henderson each one little canoe small like my hand. Then he walk away again an' pretty soon Indians take them bad fellow back to tepee."

"The canoes must signify something," mused Dick. "They're symbols of some kind. It would be interesting to know."

That night the boys slept in a large tepee that had been pitched near the shore of the lake. It was late when they awoke. Dick scrambled out of his rabbit-robe and hurried outside. A loud clamor, coming from the center of the village, increased in volume as he stood there shading his eyes with his hand.

Toma and Sandy came bustling out a short time later and the three boys stood watching the dense throng, milling about the space where the feast and dance had taken place on the previous night.

"Wonder what's up?" said Sandy. "They're making more noise than a house full of huskies. I'll bet everybody forgot to go to bed last night."

"Perhaps the village executioner is getting ready to sharpen his hatchet," guessed Dick.

"Ugh!" shivered Sandy. "I'd almost forgotten about that. It's one event that I don't intend to witness. You fellows can go if you like—but please count me out. My father went to a 'hanging' once in England, and he used to wake up nights for months afterward and would lay there thinking about it."

The approach of the chief's son cut short any further comment on the impending tragedy. The young Indian greeted them cordially, pointed to the glistening waters of the lake, and proceeded to disrobe. With a whoop of delight, Sandy commenced to follow his example.

"Come on, Toma!" Dick cried. "We'll join them. I haven't had a decent bath for—let's see—how long is it?"

"For years!" jibed Sandy. "I reckon you're about the dirtiest prospector that ever struck these parts."

Dick repaid Sandy for the insult by bouncing a small pebble off his defamer's head. A moment later they were engaged in a friendly scuffle, when a warning shout from Toma drew their attention.

"Henderson!"

Less than eighty yards behind them the outlaw, a heavy club in each hand, battled his way through the crowd. His towering form plunged this way and that in an effort to shake himself free of the two or three swarthy figures that still clung to him. Like a madman he fought forward fifteen or twenty yards, then went down suddenly before a concerted rush that literally tramped him in the sand under the infuriated feet of the mob.

"He was a fool to try it," said Sandy. "How in the dickens did he ever manage to free himself of the rope in the first place? Whew! He's a regular human tornado!"

"They were getting ready to take the prisoners away somewhere, by the looks of it. Probably he was untied for a moment, and he saw his chance," Dick replied.

"He'll never have another one," Sandy prophesied. "I'll bet they'll watch him so closely from now on, they'll all need glasses for their worn-out eyes. I hope he didn't kill any of them."

A splash in the water near at hand recalled their forgotten swim, and the two boys looked up just as the chief's son came blowing to the surface a few feet from shore.

"He's a cool one," admired Dick. "He didn't pay any more attention to the struggle back there just now than he would to a dog fight."

Sandy kicked off his moccasins and socks and paused to wriggle his toes in the sand.

"I'm very anxious to know what they intend to do with Baptiste and Henderson. Toma, don't you suppose you could find out. You said last night that you could undersand a few words of what they said at the meeting. Why don't you try to question the chief's son?"

"Bye-'n'-bye I speak to him," promised Toma. "But why you worry so much 'bout them?"

CHAPTER XXIV

THE CARIBOU HERD

A BELATED breakfast followed the swim. Greatly refreshed, both in mind and body, Dick and Sandy repaired to the shade of an ancient spruce to discuss the plans for the day. Toma, who had struck up a close friendship with the young Indian, had betaken himself to the village in an effort to gather the information that Sandy's morbid curiosity seemed to require.

"We ought to go back to the mine as soon as possible," said Dick. "I'm anxious to see how things are, and especially to find out about the moose-hide sacks. I doubt very much whether they're still stored in the main shaft. The chances are that Henderson and his men attempted to take them with them when they were driven from the mine."

"I hope we'll be able to find them," Sandy responded. "If they're not buried under the charred remains of the cabin that must now be littering the main shaft, we may have to search the entire north side of the plateau."

"Another reason why we ought to hasten back to the mine," Dick pointed out, "is because your Uncle Walter and the mounted police are scheduled to arrive there in the next day or two."

"But what makes you think that?" asked Sandy.

"Henderson himself said so. One of his Indian runners came in with the news the night before we were captured by the outlaws. That was the reason why Henderson was in such a hurry to strip the mine, as he called it, and make his 'get-away'."

Sandy nodded and lapsed into a short silence.

"You're right, Dick. We ought to hurry back," he finally broke forth. "If Uncle Walter and Corporal Richardson arrive at the mine during our absence, they'll be terribly alarmed. Everything there is in an awful mess. The cabin's burned. Here and there, they'll come across signs of the Indian attack. They may possibly find a few dead bodies of the outlaws. You can guess what they'll think has become of us."

"Yes," shuddered Dick, "I know what they'll think. It wouldn't occur to them that we'd been taken by the Indians."

"Why not return today?" suggested Sandy.

"We'll try to, Sandy. I only wish that there was some way that we could talk to the chief's son and

explain matters to him. If we hurry away he may think that we don't appreciate his kindness."

Sandy gazed thoughtfully at his chum for a few moments, then rose decisively to his feet.

"Well, it can't be helped. Let's go over to the village and see if we can find Toma. He's right in his element now. It would tickle him pink if we would decide to remain here for the rest of the summer."

Dick laughed as he swung into step beside his friend.

"You're wrong there. Toma may enjoy a day or two of this, but the novelty would soon wear off. He's on the job day and night. Besides, he's troubled with a secret ambition."

"What is it?"

"He hopes some day to become a mounted police scout like Malemute Slade. It's about all he lives for. He'll be the proudest mortal in seven kingdoms and fourteen republics if they ever decide to give him a chance."

"And he'd make good, too," said Sandy.

"I know it. In some respects he's almost as clever as Malemute Slade right now. Corporal Richardson and Inspector Cameron are keeping an eye on him. It's hard to get good scouts for the mounted."

The subject of this short but complimentary appraisement came suddenly in view, accompanied by the chief's son. Both were smiling in great good humor as they approached.

"I make 'em pretty good talk," Toma proudly announced. "I find out where Indian take Baptiste an' Henderson. Where you think?"

"I can't imagine," replied Dick.

"Thunder River."

"Thunder River!" exclaimed Sandy. "What for?"

"I suppose," said Dick, "they intend to drown them or else throw them over a cliff."

"No," said Toma, shaking his head, "Indian do better thing than that. Big men an' chief decide about that last night. You remember 'bout little canoes chief gave to Baptiste and Henderson?"

"Yes, I remember you mentioned it."

"When he give 'em Baptiste, Henderson little canoes he mean by that a certain thing. He mean they take voyage on river. He send 'em down river."

"How kind of the dear old chief," said Sandy sarcastically.

"Not so kind you think," retorted Toma. "Indians take Baptiste, Henderson to bad place in river. Put each one in different canoe, then push canoe away from shore. No paddle! Nothing! God swim along under the water——"

"What!" shouted Dick and Sandy in unison. "What did you say?"

"God swim along under the water," calmly repeated Toma, "an' if he see man in canoe very bad he tip it over. Mebbe man not very bad, so he no tip."

"What makes you think that God swims in the water?" Dick inquired, suppressing a smile.

"Indians see him many times—they tell me that."

"A river manitou," said Sandy, winking slyly at Dick. "I've heard of him before. Do you suppose he'll permit Henderson and Baptiste to pass safely through the rapids?"

"No can tell." Toma shook his head gravely. "Sometimes bad fellow from tribe get through, but not very often. This afternoon we find out about Baptiste, Henderson. You see for yourself. Indian get ready go Thunder River pretty soon. Chief's son he like it we go along."

"But we ought to return to the mine, Toma. Factor MacClaren and the mounted police are almost due now, and we'd hate to miss them."

The guide's face clouded with disappointment. From his expression and actions it was evident that he looked forward to the ordeal at the river with considerable anticipation.

"Chief's son feel bad you no go," he declared disconsolately.

"It can't be helped," Sandy interjected. "You must explain to him somehow. Tell him we'd like to stay and would gladly go with him to the river if we weren't expecting the arrival of friends at the mine."

Toma performed the unpleasant task with his usual willingness. He had some difficulty, however. At the first attempt the chief's son stared blankly at the perspiring interpreter, unable to translate the confusing jumble of words, signs and gestures the guide showered upon him. Toma had nearly exhausted his supply of ideas before he succeeded in making himself understood. Dawning comprehension showed itself in the quickly brightening features, then suddenly a smile rewarded Toma for his efforts.

With a good-natured grunt he turned, motioning to the boys to follow, and led the way to a small clearing in the woods, where a herd of Indian ponies, picketed in the long grass, raised their heads and snorted in affright.

Dick and Sandy paused in wonder.

"Can you beat that!" gleefully shouted the latter. "He's going to lend us ponies, Dick. If that isn't the last word in kindness and generosity, I'll eat Toma for dinner."

"If that is really his intention, we'll get back to the mine in a hurry," chuckled Dick.

"You bet!" grinned Toma. "We ride fast. What you say if Toma tell him thank you."

"You can fall on his neck and kiss him if you like," said Sandy, jumping about and clapping his hands in delight. "By George, he's a true sport if there ever was one. Just for this I'm going to give him my jack-knife and pocket mirror."

The suggestion seemed a good one and the three boys turned out their pockets and took inventory of the contents. Sandy handed over the mirror and knife with an elaborate bow; Dick parted with his pocket-compass without a single sigh of regret, while Toma's contribution consisted of a much-prized mouth-organ, two steel fish-hooks and a string of glass beads.

The young Indian was so overcome by this liberality that his hands shook as he examined each object in turn. The harmonica especially enthralled him. He listened to Toma's expert piping on this, the most favored of all musical instruments among the Indians in the North, with eyes that grew bright with pleasure, and broke forth at the conclusion of the short concert with an awed expression of approval.

Less than an hour later, loaded down with fresh meat and fish, a gift from the Indians, and with the shouts and plaudits of a large crowd that had gath-

ered to see them off, the young adventurers turned the heads of their ponies southward and cantered away. The chief's son accompanied them for several miles before he waved his final farewell. As the horse and rider disappeared in a turn of the forest path, Dick heaved a sigh of regret.

"I hated to see him go," he confided to Sandy. "I wonder if he'll ever come over and visit us at the mine."

"I sincerely hope so."

"He come all right," Toma assured them. "He tell me mebbe he ride over tomorrow to see how we get along."

A few miles farther on the forest thinned out and presently they rode forth across an open prairie. To the south lay the plateau. Far to the westward, a chain of purple-belted hills extended back to meet the rugged slope of Dominion Range. In this direction, above the horizon's broken rim, they could discern plainly many snowy mountain peaks.

"It take about three hours to get back to mine," guessed Toma.

Dick, gazing away in the direction of the plateau, nodded his head.

"Yes, it shouldn't take much longer than that."

He paused, squinting in the bright morning sunlight.

"I wonder if my eyes are deceiving me," he suddenly broke forth. "What are those dark spots a little west and south of here? Looks to me like a band of horsemen."

"Unless it's a whole tribe of Indians on the march—it couldn't be that," Sandy interposed, reining up his pony. "If I didn't know better, I'd say it was a big herd of cattle."

"Caribou!" trilled Toma, becoming suddenly tremendously excited, and almost falling off his mount as he craned his neck in order to get a better view. "Pretty soon you see something mebbe you never forget. Only one time before I watch 'em big caribou herd."

Dick and Sandy had often been told about but had never witnessed one of the most interesting and marvelous sights to be seen in the far North—a migrating herd of caribou! Almost as numerous as the bison or American buffalo that once roamed over the western plains of the United States, twice a year—south in the autumn, north in the spring—these sleek, antlered beasts, that very much resemble the reindeer of northeastern Europe, formed themselves into vast herds and started forth on the inevitable trek to new grazing grounds.

Dick's breath caught with excitement as he followed their slow, unhurried course. On and on they

came in a dense, black wave, pouring out over the prairie in one long, seemingly endless column. Their thundering hooves shook the earth. Had the boys possessed rifles and been less kind-hearted, they might easily have slaughtered hundreds of the mild-eyed, forward-surging animals without leaving a single gap in the line.

"In all my life I've never seen anything so wonderful!" Sandy gasped.

"Neither have I," admired Dick. "I can believe now the story that Malemute Slade told me one time. He and a mounted policeman, named Corporal Casserley, were proceeding north through the first heavy snow of early winter when they met a huge herd of caribou travelling south. For three hours they stood shivering in the cold, waiting for the herd to go by. Finally, they were forced to build a campfire and erect a shelter. It was not until noon of the following day that the last of the herd passed and Slade and Casserley were permitted to proceed on their journey."

"I'd hate to ride out in the path of the caribou," Sandy declared, as he turned his pony's head. "It might cause them to stampede."

"It would be very apt to," Dick replied. "Personally, I haven't any desire to be trampled under

their hooves. In preference to being chopped into mince-meat, I think I'll steer my course more to the east and avoid them."

"I think like that too," smiled Toma. "What you say we hurry along now an' get back to mine. Pretty soon we get hungry an' no like to stop an' build campfire then. Much better we travel fast an' cook 'em big dinner soon we get there."

"And I want to get there before Uncle Walter arrives," remembered Sandy.

"I don't think we'll find them at the mine," said Dick. "They'll be in exactly the same boat that we were. They won't know where the mine is. During the last hour or two I've been turning things over in my mind, and I've just about come to the conclusion that our best plan is to go right on past the plateau to Thunder River, where we made the crossing. I'm sure we'll meet them sooner by doing that."

"Of course we will. Funny I never thought about it. But that means, Dick, that we have a longer ride ahead of us than we first expected. Even by forced travelling, we won't reach the river much before night."

"Yes, that's true."

"And we'll have to stop to graze the ponies, not to mention preparing our own lunch."

"Yes."

"Then, let's hurry!"

With a last look at caribou, they dug their heels into their impatient mounts and sped southward, whooping like three cowboys.

CHAPTER XXV

REUNION

SANDY sat with his chin in his hands, his brooding, disconsolate eyes fixed on the opposite shore of Thunder River.

"They aren't coming tonight," he finally exploded. "Not a sign of them. "We've been sitting here for hours just wasting our time. I'm beginning to believe that Henderson lied about that Indian messenger. If Uncle Walter and the mounted police were really coming, they ought to be here now."

"Don't be so impatient, Sandy," Dick laughed. "If you keep on worrying like that, you'll be a nervous wreck by the time they do get here. Of course, they're coming. If not tonight—tomorrow or the next day. I see no reason to doubt Henderson's statement."

"Tomorrow or the next day!" groaned the other. "Mighty cheering, aren't you? If I actually thought they wouldn't arrive before then, I'd cross the river and go on to meet them."

"You foolish fellow if you do that," stated Toma, throwing a handful of pebbles into the swiftly-flowing stream. "You easy pass by each other by mistake an' not know thing about it. Bye-'n'-bye you find you hit trail for Fort Good Faith an' factor an' mounted police same time hit trail close to mine. How you like that?"

"I wouldn't like it," responded Sandy, "and I haven't the least intention of pulling a crazy stunt like that. What I would do if I crossed, would be to search for them along the river. You remember the trouble we had in finding a place where the current wasn't too swift for a raft. It is only natural to suppose that they may be having the same trouble."

"True enough," agreed Dick. "But eventually they'd be forced to come down here. It's the only safe crossing."

"I'm not so sure about that."

"Another thing, you can't cross over without a raft," Dick went on. "It would be more difficult to build a raft on this side of the river than on the other. The trees are all on the other side."

"There's plenty of driftwood," Sandy pointed out.

"I think mebbe it good idea if we do build raft," Toma suddenly spoke up. "It save time for mounted police. First thing they have to do when they come is make ready chop down trees. Mebbe pretty tired

an' no like do that. Factor MacClaren him be glad when he find raft all ready—only wait for him to cross."

"You said a mouthful!" approved Sandy. "We can have one ready in two or three hours. Then we'll slip over to the other side and wait until they come."

Dick acquiesced willingly, not only because the suggestion seemed a good one, but also because the work entailed would cause them to forget the slow, monotonous passing of time. Sandy became cheerful again almost immediately. He and Toma hurried away to select the logs from the large piles of driftwood, while Dick sauntered over to the three ponies and returned a moment later with an axe and a coil of rope.

When twilight descended, their task was nearly completed. Toma and Dick were tying the last log in place when a fervid, reverberating halloo sounded across the canyon. Dropping everything, the three boys darted to their feet.

"Yih-! Yip!" screamed Sandy. "Who's there?"

"Mounted police!" came the answering shout. "Is that you, Sandy?"

Sandy's hysterical reply took the form of a screech that might have been heard for miles. Dick's own contributing whoop was scarcely less powerful.

"Coming over?" Sandy's question stirred up another battery of echoes.

"No raft! Everybody safe?"

"Yes, we're all here. Wait just a few minutes. Own raft almost finished. Stand by, we'll soon be there."

Twenty minutes later they had made the crossing in safety and were joyfully helped ashore by the three men, Corporal Richardson, Factor MacClaren and Malemute Slade. Vocal confusion ensued. Everybody talked at once. With a strangled cry, Sandy threw himself in the outspread arms of Walter MacClaren. Malemute Slade and Corporal Richardson took turns in pounding Dick and Toma on the back.

"Thank God, we got here in time," Corporal Richardson declared fervently. "We hardly expected to find you alive."

"Why not?" asked Dick.

"Why not!" Corporal Richardson repeated Dick's question sharply. "Why not! Because every member of Henderson's murderous gang followed you out here. They're here—right in this vicinity now. We've been right on the jump ever since we heard the news."

"What news?"

"Why—the news that they had followed you."

"If you ain't seen 'em, you're liable to before long," Malemute Slade hinted darkly. "Did you fellers find the mine?"

"Yes, we found it," answered Dick.

"Any good?"

"It's a peach!"

"Funny Henderson didn't take it away from you."

"Why, he did," shouted Sandy. "He took it away from us the very same day we found it."

"Well, that sure is tough luck. Never mind," Malemute Slade patted Sandy's arm comfortingly, "mebbe we can get it back fer yuh. Mebbe we——"

"But we've already got it back," Dick interrupted him.

"Got it back? What do yuh mean? See here, young feller—you're not spoofin' me. I think not!"

Bit by bit the story came out. Sandy, Dick and even Toma took turns in the telling. Eagerly, the three men gathered around them and listened, often interrupting the narrator to ply him with questions. Often Corporal Richardson, unable to follow the broken thread of the story's sequence, threw up his hands in despair:

"Hold on there, Dick! Not so fast! Wait a moment, Sandy, you forgot to tell us what happened

before that. Toma, why don't you speak in Cree. We'll understand you better. You're too excited to talk 'em English tonight."

It was so late when the tale was concluded, that by common consent the party decided not to cross the river that night.

"It will be perfectly safe to leave the ponies on the other side," said Dick. "There's plenty of grass where we have them picketed. I don't believe anything will come to disturb them."

"We have our own pack-horses on this side," laughed Factor MacClaren. "We left them in charge of three half-breeds up there on the level ground above the canyon. I thought it would be better not to make the descent with the horses until we had looked around a bit."

"Did you have much difficulty in following our trail?" Dick enquired.

"No, not very much. Malemute Slade is a good tracker and we found many of your campfires. Once we picked up an old pair of moccasins that we thought had been discarded by Sandy. They were small—about the size he usually wears."

The camp was astir early on the following morning. When Dick and Sandy tumbled out of the blankets they had borrowed from Factor MacClaren,

a pan of bacon sizzled over the fire and the odor of strong black coffee blended with the smell of spruce and balsam. Malemute Slade and Corporal Richardson nodded a cheery greeting as the two young adventurers, still rubbing their eyes, stumbled down to the river for an icy-cold plunge.

Shivering for a moment in anticipation, Dick raised his arms above his head, darted for a few paces over the smooth white sand and shot straight out into the gurgling current. Sandy hit the water almost simultaneously. As the two boys came blowing to the surface, Dick made a playful swipe at his chum's head. Instinctively Sandy ducked.

"I'll race you down to that big rock, you big, overgrown puppy," he called out mockingly. "I'm in my natural element now. Try to catch me!"

They plowed through the water. An expert swimmer, Sandy won the race by a wide margin. He was sitting on the rock, feet dangling above the surface of the stream, when Dick came puffing up. But instead of the look of triumph on his face that Dick had expected. Sandy's countenance was distorted painfully.

"Why, Sandy—what's the matter? Did you get cramps?"

The other did not reply. He was staring at Dick

now with eyes that were wide with horror. He slipped from the rock in a sort of panic and struck out for shore. Hastily, Dick followed him.

Wading out, Dick approached the trembling figure.

"You're frightened," he declared. "Or are you sick, Sandy? Was the water too cold for you?"

"Dick—I saw it! A body floated past! A man!"

"A what——" gasped Dick.

"I was crawling on the rock. I could see it plainly. I tried to call out."

Sandy's voice choked. He reached out and gripped Dick by the arm. His lips were blue from fright and cold.

"It was Henderson!" he whispered.

Perceiving that something was wrong, Malemute Slade and Corporal Richardson hurried over.

"The boy's sick!" exclaimed Slade. He turned his head: "MacClaren, fetch a blanket. Hurry!"

A moment later they were chafing his limbs, and had wrapped him up in heavy folds of the thick, woollen blanket.

"You boys ought to know better than this," Corporal Richardson scolded them. "Thunder River is a glacier-fed stream and its water is like ice. Don't go swimming in it again. No wonder Sandy got cramps."

"He didn't," Dick protested. "He's frightened.

He said that he saw the body of a man floating past. He thinks it was Henderson."

"Bosh!" declared the policeman, pointing over at the river. "The current is full of driftwood. A water-logged stump a short distance away might easily be mistaken for the body of a man. What Sandy thought he saw and what he actually saw—are two different things. Besides, Sandy is nervous and unstrung as a result of his experiences over at the mine."

"I did see it, I tell you!"

"There! There!" soothed Factor MacClaren. "You'll be all right in a moment. Please forget about it. We're having breakfast now, Sandy. Toma is pouring the coffee this very minute."

With the possible exception of Dick and Malemute Slade, no one believed that Sandy had seen anything out of the ordinary, notwithstanding the young Scotch lad's angry protestations. In the hurry and bustle of the morning, the incident was soon forgotten. Sandy himself soon recovered his usual cheerfulness, assisting Dick and Toma in the work of rafting the supplies of the police party to the opposite side of the river.

The trek over to the mine commenced early in the afternoon. On this occasion it was an imposing cavalcade that wound its way up through the rocks to

the wide plain that stretched away to the westward. In advance, went the three half-breed packers with the ponies; behind them, Corporal Richardson and Malemute Slade, while Factor MacClaren and the three boys, chatting animatedly, brought up the rear.

"We feel a lot different than the last time we went over this route to the plateau," Dick remarked. "It was raining and we slept part of the night in that thicket you see just ahead."

"You must have had a terrible experience," said the factor. "I doubt very much whether I could have endured the nervous tension had I been with you. Looking at it from a selfish viewpoint, I can see now how very fortunate I was that that pesky inventory prevented me from coming along. I might not have been as lucky as the three of you were."

"It wasn't good luck at all, Uncle Walter," grinned Sandy.

"Well, what was it?"

"Courage and good management," declared Sandy, as he winked slyly at Dick.

CHAPTER XXVI

DEBTS OF GRATITUDE

MALEMUTE SLADE kicked a branch of burning wood into the center of the roaring campfire and turned eagerly to address the scarlet-coated figure of Corporal Richardson.

"It couldn't o' come out any better if we'd done the thing ourselves," he drawled complaisantly. "I guess there ain't anybody what can deny that. Here's the mine—an' there's Dick an' Sandy an' that young scamp of a Toma—all as safe an' happy an' contented as if nothin' had ever happened."

As he spoke, Slade pointed to the ruins of the log cabin, around which the three boys had gathered. In the center of the charred and littered space, one could make out, even at that distance, a gaping hole partially filled with debris. But no one, unless he had made a more thorough investigation, might have guessed that the hole, instead of being the cellar or basement of the ruined cabin was, in reality, the main shaft leading to a very valuable gold mine.

The ruined cabin was the one and only grim reminder of a night of tragedy. Slade eyed it contemplatively as he continued in his drawling tone:

"It kind o' makes me shudder when I think o' what might have happened if Dick hadn't fought Baptiste, when the Frenchie knocked down the Indian kid. It's the only thing that saved 'em. Them Indians is as friendly now as the friendliest Cree in the settlements along the Peace. The chief's son was over here 'bout an hour ago to pay his respects to the boys an' to promise 'em that they needn't worry 'bout bein' molested. That's what I call gratitude!"

"When the boys told their story I could hardly believe it," Corporal Richardson spoke reminiscently. "I can imagine how they felt when the Indian attack took place. Sandy said that the three of them were so struck with terror, that for a long time they didn't move a foot away from their bed-rolls. The attack was nearly over before they plucked up sufficient courage to make an attempt to escape."

Malemute Slade drew out his pipe and grinned across at the mounted policeman.

"At any rate, them Indians has saved you an' me a whole lot o' trouble. I don't imagine we'll ever hear from Henderson again. His band is pretty well

broke up. I sometimes wonder how many o' them outlaws escaped."

"No one knows except the Indians, and I doubt very much whether they do. The outlaws left everything behind, including those precious moose-hide sacks, and a large quantity of supplies and provisions. The boys have food enough to last them for seven or eight months."

He broke off suddenly, as a familiar figure emerged from a small canvas tent in the space to the right and came over to join them. Advancing, Factor MacClaren waved an arm cheerily.

"I'm getting things in order over at my private hotel," he laughingly called out. "At my age, gentlemen, personal comfort means everything. It is as necessary and important to my well-being as excitement and adventure is to those three young scallawags over there at the mine. There they are puttering about, entirely oblivious of the fact that it's fully three-quarters of an hour past our regular lunch time."

"I'll call 'em," said Malemute Slade, placing two fingers in his mouth. "Now watch 'em race!"

At the shrill summons, three jostling forms scrambled over the rocks near the site of the former cabin, and sped forward for a few yards, neck and neck.

Then the race became a hard fought contest in which Dick, panting and out of breath, won by a narrow margin from Toma. Sandy was grumbling as he came up.

"They had to push me, of course. I'm protesting this race on the grounds that two of the contestants presumed to take unfair advantage."

"I'll look into it," laughingly promised Corporal Richardson. Then he turned to the victor. "Dick, how are operations progressing at the mine?"

"Fine!" panted Dick. "We'll clear the shaft before night. Once we're able to get into the mine, work'll go along more quickly."

"There's one thing I don't understand," Sandy's uncle declared, as he pulled a grub-sack closer to the fire. "Your mine hasn't a dump. What becomes of the rock and shale?"

"We asked ourselves that very same question," replied Dick, " but we discovered the answer the first time we descended into the mine. We have water pressure to carry away everything except the pure ore itself."

"But I don't understand," puzzled the factor. "What do you mean by water pressure?"

"There's an underground river which flows below the mine," explained Dick. "One of the passageways slopes down to a wide opening, through which one

can hear the sound of rushing water. The former owners of the mine dumped all of the refuse here and it was quickly carried away. Sandy and I have figured out that the source of the river is the deep lake, near the wooden cross, two miles to the east of us. You remember seeing it."

"Yes," answered the factor.

"You boys are rich now," congratulated Corporal Richardson. "What are you going to do with all your wealth?"

"Well, we have some pressing obligations," hinted Dick.

"What are they?"

"Our first debt is to the Indians. We've decided to give them half ownership in the mine. Papers will be made out in the regular way and a guardian appointed."

"Who will be the guardian?" asked Factor MacClaren.

"The Royal North West Mounted."

"But they may not care to accept such a responsibility," smiled the corporal.

"O they're all pretty decent fellows," teased Sandy. "I don't think we'll have very much difficulty on that score."

Corporal Richardson laughed.

"Are yuh really serious 'bout this, Dick?" de-

manded Malemute Slade. "Yuh don't mean you'd give half the mine to them Indians?"

"We don't mean anything else," Dick spoke very quietly. "They spared our lives. We wouldn't be here now if it wasn't for them. When we went to school back in the States, our history books told us how white men have been taking land and valuable resources away from the Indians for the past three hundred years. Here's one case where the Indian is going to receive what's coming to him."

"Here! Here!" shouted the factor. "Good boy, Dick! If you and Sandy and Toma can manage to carry out your plan successfully we'll all be proud of you."

Dick flushed with embarrassment, then hurried on:

"The debt to the Indians is not the only one. There are three persons, all of them white men, who are entitled to share in our good fortune. These men are Factor MacClaren, Corporal Richardson and Malemute Slade."

The right hand of the mounted policeman stole over to Dick's shoulder.

"We appreciate your kindness, Dick, but I'm afraid that you'll have to wipe out a part of that debt. As members of the force, we—Malemute Slade and myself—have no right to accept anything at all.

We've already been paid for any service we may have rendered you. It is a part of our regular duty."

"If that's the case, will you and Malemute Slade accept our thanks for all you've done for us," blurted out Sandy.

"Gladly! It is nothing at all. We wish you every success in your new undertaking."

"Thank you," said Dick and Sandy in unison.

A short silence ensued. Presently Sandy walked over to the grub-sack and stooped down to untie the string.

"I'm hungry as a bear," he grumbled. "It's getting so there's no system around this camp. Who's cook?"

"I suppose," said Corporal Richardson with a sly twinkle in his eye, "that when the ghost of Scar-Face or Henderson or Baptiste La Lond comes back here to visit you, he won't recognize your thriving mining town as the place of his former misfortunes."

"You bet he won't!" emphatically declared Sandy.

Dick laughed—a cheery, boyish laugh—as he picked up a frying pan and a slab of bacon, opened his hunting knife and then squatted down in front of the fire.

THE END

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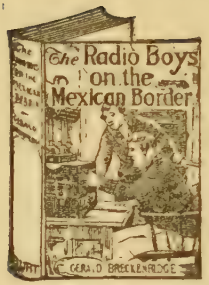

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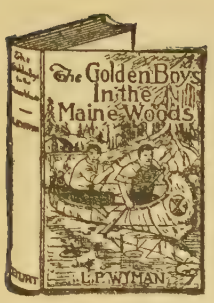

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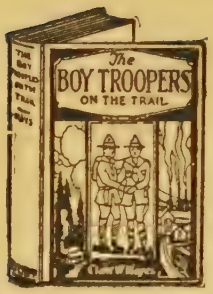

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